This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

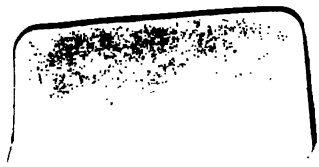
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3433 07487055 5



NCW
HOCKLEY.

THE

WIDOW OF CALCUTTA;

THE

HALF-CASTE DAUGHTER;

AND

OTHER SKETCHES.

BY A TRAVELLER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

D. N. CARVALHO, FLEET STREET.

MDCCCXLI.

112833B

THE

ENGLISH IN INDIA.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was nearly a month after the occurrence of the events stated in the former chapter, when one evening Mahommed Sultaun, and Cassim, the favourite servant of Captain Seymour, met in the Sudder* Bazar of Kirkpore, Captain Seymour being at that time a visitor at the house of the Resident's first assistant.

"By my soul, Cassim," said the former, "where have you been these dozen moons?—Your place has been empty."

"Where have *you* been rather is it?" said Cassim, "I thought you had lost the burrah

* Great or general market.

sahib's favour, and had sought service elsewhere."

"My hands are always full. I have a master;—I have a mistress;—in a family there is always plenty of business;—you are the servant of a gentleman without a wife, and you have more time to spare than I have words."

"You are wrong. I have enough to do and to spare," replied Cassim who, be it observed, as well as his companion, was now speaking the Hindostanee dialect used by the Mussulmauns of India. "The sahib, my master, lives like a prince, and his table would furnish a whole caravan. What can I do? It is my fate to be his servant."

"Plenty work and good pay, better than little work and little pay," said Mahommed. "The feringhee, Seymour, has an open hand."

"He gives hard blows sometimes too," returned Cassim. "However, salam, Mahommed, for I must go home. I am on my master's errand."

"One word. Will you come to my house

in two hours and eat rice? I shall have curry and pilau enough to feast ten faquirs."

The invitation was too agreeable to be refused; the time was fixed, and they separated, Cassim intent only on the delicacies with which he was to regale himself, whilst his friend was occupied with deeper cogitations on the best manner of picking the youth's brains.

If Cassim had a passion in the world, it was for a savoury curry or a well spiced pilau. His heart was entirely occupied with anticipations of the feast that awaited him. He thought the minutes had never before passed so tediously. When the moment of freedom arrived, he flew rather than ran to the house of Mahommed Sultaun, which fortunately was not far from that of his master's friend.

Mussulmauns as they were, they did not scruple to add to the relish of their repast, by potations of such wines and liquors as Mahommed had contrived to purloin from his employer, leaving the arrack of the bazars to the grosser appetite of those to whom these dain-

ties were not accessible. So they ate and drank, until Mahommed believed that his friend's discretion could not resist the attack he meditated on it.

"So, after all, you have not such an easy life of it then, Cassim?" began the dubashee. "We all have a destiny;—I find no fault with mine,—plenty to eat,—plenty to drink;—good pay,—much dustour*;—whilst we live, we will not devour grief, as long as the câfir has gold to give us."

"You say well," said Cassim, taking a long whiff at his kaleean†. "If we must eat their dirt, at least we are paid. A curse on all feringhees!"

"On their heads be it!" ejaculated Mahommed. "But you,—your bread is sweet compared to mine. No sooner does a feringhee marry, than his wife puts chili‡ into all our food. Resident sahib gave no trouble, till he brought a woman,—whom Allah confound!—

* Custom, as explained in note, page 41, Vol. I.

† A pipe somewhat resembling a hookah.

‡ A very pungent vegetable.

to his house. Since then the world has turned upside down."

"The journeys that daughter of Zatanai has caused me!" said Cassim, after a deep potation. "I take more steps in a month on her account, than would carry me to Mecca. Three or four times a week I am sent from the cantonment hither, with a chit,—or my master himself comes to visit some of his friends, and I am brought with him. No, no, Mahommed;—never compare the business that feringhee woman brings on your shoulders, to the load she lays on mine! Rupees! By the head of my father, such trouble should be paid for in mohurs*."

"But what can your master have to say to the wife of mine?" said Mahommed. "These feringhees are shameless enough with their wives, and show their faces to all the world, but one woman does not have two husbands."

"What do I know?" said Cassim, just sober enough to see the necessity of caution, and to

* A gold coin worth fifteen rupees.

evade this too palpable question. "I ask no questions,—I do what my master orders."

"Right, right, Cassim," said Mahommed, who saw his error. "However, you and I are friends, and I will tell you a little secret. Fatimah, the ayah of the burrah-bebe-sahib, wears such gold bangles as are fit for a begum*; that woman laughs at your face, Cassim. You used to call her your soul and your life, whilst Seymour sahib, your master, persuades her to live with him, and then they jest about you together. Oh, my ears are open! Their words reach me when she steals to him at night from the verandah. You may make your eyes wide, Cassim. It is true that I tell you."

"What news is this?" said Cassim, inflamed with wine, anger, and rising jealousy. "What words are you saying? The bangles are to pay Fatimah for keeping my master's secret. Your bebe sahib opens her heart to her,—she holds it in her hand. You talk like a fool."

"Softly, Cassim!" said Mahommed, laugh-

* Princess.

ing. "Fatimah is a cunning baggage, and throws dust in your eyes. I know what I am saying, and my words are true."

"They are lies, and you are the father of lies," said Cassim, now roused to fury. "I tell you, Fatimah laughs at my master's beard; and *your* mistress laughs at *your* master's beard; and if you doubt, watch to-morrow morning at day-break, and you will see me give a little chit to Fatimah, and then the bebe-sahib will go to take the air on her horse, and not on the elephant, because the gora-wallahs* are stupid asses, who run on out of sight when she bids them."

"Well, well," said Mahommed, "we are friends; we will see this business. After all, women are not to be trusted."

"Who doubts it?" said Cassim, who began to feel the effects of his repeated draughts, and saw the lamp before him dancing about like a meteor. "These feringhees trust them, and their faces are blackened, and doubly blackened! Let it be so."

* Horse-keepers—grooms.

"You say well," said Mahommed, who, believing he had gained as much information as the present state of his companion would permit him to impart, made signals of separation, that he might have leisure to reflect on the next step he should take.

Before the wily Hindoo slept, he had arranged all his measures, and slumbered the more soundly because he foresaw the speedy removal of the great obstacle to his rise in the world.

At his master's dressing-hour, he a second time appeared before him, and dismissing the dressing-boy commenced operations.

"Seymour sahib never come Residency now," he began in English, the better, probably, to conceal what he had to say from the ears of any servants who, notwithstanding his prudence, might be within hearing.

Mr. Tomkins started, and his breathing became irregular. The effect of the former communication made by Mahommed, had been so dreadful to his feelings, that he shrank from the mention of Seymour's name by *his* lips, with

horror. He did not reply, but the cunning Asiatic observed that he listened.

"I see Seymour sahib's dubashee last night," he resumed. "He say one little word; mistress too much sorry because Resident sahib make quarrel with his master."

"How dares the slave utter these slanders?" said Mr. Tomkins in terrible wrath;—"does your mistress speak to him and you of these things, that you have the audacity to lie thus before me? Silence, sir, and begone!"

Mahommed did not anticipate that his hint would produce exactly this effect. Though somewhat dismayed, he was not driven from his purpose. He did not obey his master's order, but threw himself at his feet, after the manner of eastern prostration.

"Master, my father, my mother,—I eat master's bread;—master take my life," he said humbly. "I too much sorry,—but by my child's head, I not lie,—all true I tell. S'pose master give order, I silent;—I say all,—what master's pleasure."

Sensible of the humiliation of listening thus

to the reports of his servant, yet goaded by that harrowing passion, jealousy, to know that which, if known, might too probably darken the whole of his future existence, Mr. Tomkins, after a struggle, desired the man to rise, and to speak quickly what he had to tell.

Mahommed obeyed.

"Cassim, that Seymour sahib dubashee, he eat little rice with me last night. He want Fatimah, mistress's ayah, for his wife;—I tell him his sahib give her new bangles,—want her live in his house. Then Cassim too much angry,—say I one lie-man,—say his master laugh at sahib's beard, and very often send little chit to mistress, till her horse ride morning time,—elephant not ride. Gora-wallahs got no sense;—go away far off;—Seymour sahib come on horse,—then he and mistress ride off together—same like this morning."

Mr. Tomkins could not answer. This arrow was doubly barbed by his recollecting how often he had wondered that his wife should choose to ride out unattended by any but his horse-keepers,—how she had ridiculed his remon-

strances, by placing them to the account of Indian pride and ostentation. She should consider one footman sufficient attendance in England, she said, and surely she paid enough deference to the prejudices of *this* country by requiring two grooms. *She* feared no danger, and why then did he?

Mahommed saw that the demon he had invoked, was at work. He waited for no answer, but resumed.

"Cassim gave chit to Fatimah very soon morning—tell mistress, Seymour sahib left cantonment,—come to this place, and want to see mistress. S'pose master not believe my words, I wait till night-time;—I find Cassim and next time he bring little chit, I take, and show master. Master then see I not tell lie."

"Seymour is here, is he?" said Mr. Tomkins thoughtfully, and soliloquizing rather than addressing Mahommed. "Colonel Middleton should keep him to his duty;—he allows his officers to run wild."

"What use?" said Mahommed quickly;

" s'pose he not come to mistress, mistress come to him."

Was it possible?—Was the proud,—the haughty—Harriet,—in truth the by-word of the very lowest of the Asiatics?—Could it be, that the wife of his bosom was so polluted, as to be derided by such as these?—The heart of the unfortunate husband trembled with mingled emotions;—shame, love, rage, jealousy, despair, each asserted its empire until reason was nearly overthrown. " Bring to me one of these letters," said he at length, " and then I will believe you speak the truth."

" By master's favour, he shall see I tell no lie," said Mahommed with a low salam, as he left his unhappy patron to the intolerable companionship of his own thoughts.

But Mahommed was not the only Hindoo whose interests were involved in this unfortunate state of affairs. Fatimah, so often alluded to, the favourite ayah of Mrs. Tomkins, was not by any means less vigilant in attending to the advantages she was deriving, and might hereafter

derive, from circumstances now occurring, than Mahommed Sultaun himself.

During the absence of her mistress on this eventful morning, it happened that she and her lover Cassim had agreed on enjoying an interview. They met just in the centre of the tope at the extremity of the Residency-compound at the appointed minute, but to the extreme surprise of Fatimah she was the first at the "trysting-place," and the step of the most devoted of her slaves was heavy as that of a man bent on reluctant business, instead of possessing the lightness and alacrity of a favoured gallant seeking his mistress.

"Well how now, Cassim sahib?" said she with mock reverence. "Your lordship finds the earth not good enough for your lordship's feet; you kick the dust before you by way of warning your slaves that you are coming.—Allah is good!—Why man what afrit* has got hold of you?"

"You may jest as you will, Fatimah," said Cassim, throwing himself on the ground;—

* An evil genius.

"the truth is, that old sinner, Mahommed Sultaun, has been throwing dirt on you and on me, until our faces are both as blackened as those of a Pariah."

"Mahommed Sultaun!—What mischief has the unclean dog been doing!—We will burn his father and his whole generation," said Fatimah with considerable animation. "I would like to see him venture so much as to lift an eye on me!—What has that son of abomination said to you, Cassim?"

"That the feringhee Seymour, has asked you to keep his house," said Cassim somewhat sullenly, for he had not quite overcome his jealousy.

"Wullah!—wullah!—and you believed him!" said Fatimah, clenching her small hands, and screaming with passion. "Oh you ten times ass!—you could believe this, you who know your master's mind,—who hold the key of his thoughts,—you believed this greatest of all lies that ever were invented!—Wullah—wullah!—Begone;—hide your face;—let me see you no more."

Cassim, however, did not think fit to obey this mandate. He was probably acute enough to know, that Fatimah would be more displeased by obedience than rebellion in such a case. By a few words of cajolery he succeeded in mollifying her, and as soon as this tempest of wrath had yielded to his soothing assurances, they united in abusing Mahommed Sultaun with a bitterness that almost equalled the deservings of that worthy.

"And what answer did you make to all these lying words of that vile old man?" said Fatimah at length. "I hope you gave him plenty of dirt to eat."

"I told him that the feringhee Seymour laughed at his beard, and his master's beard, and cared for nobody but the burrah-hebe-sahib," replied Cassim complacently.

Fatimah looked at him long, and said nothing. At length she asked in a voice affectedly subdued, "So you really told him no more than that, did you?"

"By your soul, what more should I tell him?" said Cassim, now in fine temper.

"Then," said Fatimah, rising,—"in two words, you are fit to be the grandfather of ten generations of asses.—You have done more mischief than ever was conceived by a whole nation of infidels. You are not fit to be a dresser of leather*. Begone—begone. I will give a fine character of you to your master. Begone I say, or I will call a peon† to drive you out."

Cassim gazed on her with the eye of astonishment, he saw that her anger was real, and how he had excited it by the very effort he had made to prove how completely he had exonerated her from the imputations cast on her by Mahommed Sultaun, defied all his powers of conjecture.

Fatimah, who was not, however, of a disposition to allow her rage completely to subdue her prudence, became calm as a sudden reflection occurred to her. "Hark ye, Cassim," said she; "if thou hast a grain of reason, thou must acknowledge thyself to be a most

* One of the most despised castes amongst the Hindoos.

† A police-servant attached to public officers.

pitiful fool to allow Mahommed Sultaun to pick thy brains, as I see plainly enough he has been doing. If thou hast a mind to prevent mischief, and hast no desire that I should go with my mistress over the dark sea, undo quickly all thou hast done. Swear to Mahommed by thy soul and his own, that thou hast lied. Tell him my mistress laughs at the whole race of men,—feringhees, —Hindoos,—all. And mark,—lose no word the vile old wretch of a dubashee speaks to thee; —bring me tidings,—I and my mistress will reward thee."

Poor Cassim, bewildered by the sudden turns of his mistress's manner, promised everything, caring not that he understood less than half of what he was enjoined to perform. He was quite clear, however, that he was not to shun Mahommed Sultaun, but to watch closely all he said, and to conjecture, if he might, what was the tenor of his thoughts.

As to Fatimah she did not fail to relate to her mistress all that occurred during her interview with Cassim. Mrs. Tomkins felt all the terrors of conscious guilt. Acutely sensible of

her degradation,—scorning the poor wretches whom she had been obliged to admit to her confidence,—loathing the world for which she had sacrificed so much, and whose frown she dreaded to encounter,—who can venture to describe the extent of the misery which, at this moment, harrowed her soul? She half resolved at once to quit the splendours which had become hateful to her, and braving equally censure and shame, to throw herself on the protection of Seymour. "But no," thought she, in a calmer mood, "in case of the worst, that alternative at least is left me, and let me keep my advantages until I am certain that, if not resigned, they will be torn from me."

On that very evening Cassim was entrusted by his master with a note for Mrs. Tomkins. He secured it in his cummerbund*, eager to deliver it punctually to the hands of Fatimah, to atone, if possible, for his late delinquency. There was no moon, and he rejoiced in the obscurity of the night which would secure his person, as he hoped, from the knowledge of the

* Sash.

prying Mahommed. But as he afterwards said, it was not in his destiny to escape from the snares of this misbelieving wine-drinker.

Probably Mahommed expected to find Cassim lurking about on some such mission as that which had actually brought him to the Residency. Having pledged himself to his master to intercept a letter, of the period of the arrival of which he had no positive knowledge, he judged it incumbent on him to expect that that time might come on any evening. Much, therefore, did he bless his favouring stars, which threw Cassim in his way almost as soon as he had commenced his watch, as he was tolerably sure that he could obtain from him, either by cajoleries or menace, any letter of which he was the bearer.

"Ah, Cassim," said he, as the luckless youth ran against him. "Did you soon get rid of the taste of the câfir's liquors?—I have another supply ready for us whenever you will. Another time we will have no quarrels for women. Who are they, and what are we?—You want Fatimah, now, is it so?"

"Yes," said Cassim sullenly.

"Well, you will not be warned. Some of these nights I will show you a sight. Ah, ah! brother Cassim, a woman is too much for you, believe me, who have more years on my shoulders than you have.—I can tell you,—but of what use?—She will cajole you and laugh at your beard as she has done before. I have had my day;—I have done with women."

Cassim burnt to assure his tormentor he lied, but he remembered the injunction of Fatimah, and as he would have expressed it, put the finger of silence on his lips. He therefore endeavoured to pass on without further parley, but Mahommed prevented him.

"Not so fast, Cassim," said he, "I can tell you, you are not wanted. There is a great dinner to-night, and Fatimah has slipped away. I watched her to the empty bungalow yonder;—Seymour sahib never comes here, and you may guess where he is now."

"He is riding to the cantonment," said Cassim vehemently, his anger rapidly getting the better of his discretion.—"What is this

you say, Mahommed? — My master is gone this hour."

"Be not too sure! What?—shall I not believe my own eyes?"

"Shall I doubt mine?—I had this chit," pulling it from his cummerbund, "from his own hand as he mounted his horse. There, you see it. Who lies now?"

"Let me see, let me see," said Mahommed, taking it from his companion, who was too much excited to be sensible that, in the present darkness, to *see* was impossible, and who allowed it to be drawn from his hand as passively as a man in a dream.

Mahommed instantly whispered a salam, and retreated with all the speed he could use. Cassim stood like one stupefied.—He dared not pursue the thief in the direction of the house, because he could give no account of his errand, and feared to incur the consequences of raising an outcry. Whilst yet bewildered, a hand gently touched his elbow. It was that of Fatimah.

"Well, are you here?" she said in a whisper.

"I have been looking for you this half hour. Why have you kept me waiting?—Come, what have you brought?—Give it me directly."

"Nothing," said Cassim, who between the effects of his former surprise, and his present fear of Fatimah's anger, became less and less able to give an account of himself.

"Nothing!" said Fatimah impatiently.—"Well, if you have no chit, at least there is some word, is there not?—Speak, simpleton! Why you tremble as if you had seen a goul*".

Cassim did *not* speak, and Fatimah gave him a blow on the face not of the gentlest kind.

This was an argument to the force of which he could not be insensible. Gathering courage from desperation, he said hurriedly, "what would you have?—My master gave me a chit;—I brought it;—I have met the rascal Mahommed;—he has robbed me;—such it is, and you know it."

"And he has got your master's letter you mean," said Fatimah breathlessly.

* Ghost.

"That is it," returned Cassim with the apathy of despair.

She stooped and took off her slipper, with which she gave him a blow on the mouth so violent as to prostrate him on the earth. Without a word she flew to the house, and found her mistress impatiently expecting her in her own apartment.

In as few words as possible,—and allowance must be made for the vehement ejaculations of a Hindoo,—Fatimah told all that had befallen. The unfortunate Mrs. Tomkins saw, in an instant, that her disgrace could no longer be concealed. Her husband was, at this moment, entertaining a party of gentlemen, and she knew therefore that two or three hours would elapse, before the letter would be placed in his hands. Her decision was instantly made. She shrank as much from the thought of his presence as of his reproaches, and finding ruin inevitable, she resolved to quit instantly a home from which she would soon be expelled. By the aid of Fatimah, her bearers removed her palanquin out of the compound without noise.

With rapid steps she flew across the grounds, threw herself into it, and buried her aching head amongst its pillows, whilst Fatimah followed her mistress, keeping pace with the bearers, and wondering, within herself, whether things would be as abundant at the house of Captain Seymour, which was their destination.

CHAPTER XIX.

PROBABLY no woman, how powerful soever may be the influence of the passion by which she is actuated, ever takes so decisive a step as this, without a pang of mingled regret and remorse, which may be almost a commensurate punishment for the violation of this, the holiest of social institutions.

As Harriet leant back in the palanquin which bore her for ever from respectability and fame, her mind rapidly surveyed the past. The gay dreams of her youth came before her arrayed in all their brightness;—she remembered her English home,—the mother who dwelt there, who had hailed the intelligence of her marriage as the fulfilment of all the high and ambitious hopes she had indulged in her be-

half,—of her young sisters on whose names she was casting a stain;—even of the good qualities of the man she had deserted;—the luxuries of the house she had abandoned;—the indulgence which had hitherto attended her;—the homage which had followed her footsteps;—the envy which had once only dared to whisper its censures, henceforth to peal forth her guilt "until the very welkin rang!"—All these things were in her mind, until her brain whirled with the agony of those mingled images.

Then Seymour! would he, after all, approve the step she had taken?—yet was it not enforced upon her? What other course remained? He could not surely desire that she should cleave to the house of her dishonoured husband, until expelled thence. He could not have feigned such unbounded love only to effect her undoing?—Oh! no, no! She pressed her hands over her eyes, as if to shut out such a fearful vision. It was not to be thought on. *That* at least was left her. She was sure of the love which she had so dearly purchased. It was not in nature that her reception by him

should be other than one of the warmest, tenderest welcome. She had not wronged *him*, —he had no cause of complaint. Enemies might condemn,—friends desert,—but he surely, through good and through evil, was bound to pay her for a devotedness which had relinquished all the dearest hopes of life for *him*.

In the midst of such thoughts, she found herself set down at the door of his house.

Seymour, after his ride from the Residency, had just refreshed himself, and was indulging in yawning over the last imported novel, when the cry of bearers warned him that a palanquin was approaching. Surprised at an occurrence so unusual at this hour, he listened attentively, and was at length convinced that this was the peculiar chant of the set who belonged to Mrs. Tomkins.

Startled by this conviction, he hastened into the verandah, and stood there to receive his unexpected guest on her arrival.

Pale—agitated—nearly fainting—he bore her into the hall; addressed to her such words of soothing as he could venture in his present

state of ignorance of the real nature of the circumstances which had brought her there,—mentally wondering whether a discovery had really occurred, and divided between a dread of the unpleasant consequences to which it must expose him, and anticipation of the éclat which Mrs. Tomkins's thus throwing herself on his protection, must occasion.

"Send palanquin back," said Fatimah, who by this time was at her mistress's side. "Mistress not want more;—tell go back to Residency."

Seymour looked at Harriet.

She covered her face with her hands:—"It must be so, Seymour," she said in a voice scarcely audible;—"do as she says, and let us be alone."

He obeyed. As clearly as she was able, Harriet related what had occurred,—her horror of the storm that must ensue, from which she had sought shelter with him. "Where—where—could I go?" she cried, wringing her hands; "all other doors are closed against me, henceforth for ever; but yours," she added, her

indomitable pride gleaming in her eye, "*yours* at least *was* open—*ought* to be open to me, and I have sought it."

"And doubly welcome are you," said Seymour, affecting—and affecting well—more warmth than he actually felt; for, as has been said, he was by no means insensible to the evil consequences which must follow in the train of such a step. But Seymour was not all villain; vain—wretchedly vain as he was—he had yet the feelings of a man, and he could not—would not—humiliate more, the woman who, for his sake, had already sufficiently fallen.

Mrs. Tomkins—the haughty—the beautiful Mrs. Tomkins—had now sunk into the obscurity and infamy of the mistress of Captain Seymour. In the privacy of her own apartments, she contrived to escape any possible contact with the inhabitants of the cantonment, but Seymour, compelled by his official duties to be among them, was able to report to her as much information respecting Mr. Tomkins as was generally known.

The intercepted letter had of course been placed in his hands, and her flight discovered,—whither she had fled was hardly, at any moment, a mystery, and all shadow of doubt was removed, when the bearers returned with the empty palanquin. A communication had been instantly sent to Colonel Middleton, who had gone to the Residency immediately, where he still remained, leaving the command of the Force to the next senior officer. It was reported that Mr. Tomkins was severely ill.

Captain Seymour did not add, that *he* shared with his victim the reprobation of the more respectable part of society; that hands which had formerly been extended in friendship, now shunned his grasp,—that countenances which had formerly smiled at his approach, now frowned and were averted. He was careful not to inflict on her the mortification which he felt keenly. His vanity had naturally led him to court popularity; he valued the consideration he had hitherto enjoyed, as the most triumphant proof of the

power of his manners and conversation, and *this* effect of his crime was probably as painful as any that could prossibly have attended it.

Harriet awaited some communication from her deserted husband, with agitation and apprehension. The blindest infatuation could not indulge the hope, that the matter would be suffered to rest here. She knew—she felt—that there were trials yet to be endured, to which all that had past would be comparatively light. Even whilst she dreaded the next step that was to be taken, she wished—ardently wished—that it had occurred, that the torments of her intolerable suspense might terminate.

And they *did* terminate.

It was precisely a week after her elopement, when the carriage of Colonel Middleton drove into the compound.

So little had it been expected that any visits would be paid to *her*, that no orders had been given to Captain Seymour's servants, and in answer to the usual inquiries, they said " the

bebe-sahib was at home," and asked the unexpected guests into the hall.

Captain Seymour himself was there. The apparition of his visitors overwhelmed him with an astonishment that defied all his efforts at self-possession. He felt as the vicious do feel, in presence of the good, when aware that their errors—their vices—are known.

As soon as the first salutations were exchanged —coldly and ceremoniously exchanged,—Colonel Middleton inquired for Mrs. Tomkins.

Captain Seymour, with an embarrassment natural to the occasion, said she was engaged; that is, he believed she had decided on receiving no visits under present circumstances.

"A resolution not to be condemned," Colonel Middleton observed gravely but sorrowfully. He added "that his wife sought an interview with the unfortunate lady, as the friend of her mother, a plea which, he thought, Captain Seymour himself would support with his utmost persuasion."

Mrs. Middleton was in tears, and Captain

Seymour felt so acutely the awkwardness of his position, that he was glad to seize as a pretext of retiring, the plea which Colonel Middleton afforded.

When he returned, he said he had, *with considerable difficulty*, prevailed on Mrs. Tomkins to receive Mrs. Middleton, who was conducted to the presence of the unfortunate Harriet accordingly.

Captain Seymour withdrew, and they were left alone. The cheek of Mrs. Tomkins was pale, but her eyes burned with a terrible brightness, and it seemed as if they were tearless because the source of tears was dried. She did not speak. She motioned to Mrs. Middleton to be seated, and seemed to await the revelation of the purport of her visit.

It was not on ordinary occasions that Mrs. Middleton lost her presence of mind, but this was not an ordinary occasion. It cost her a painful effort to subdue her emotion, and when subdued, she was almost at a loss for words with which to declare the purpose of her visit.

"In the character of your mother's early

friend," she said at length, "I have sought you here. Whatever may be my other claims they might be waived, but *this* can scarcely fail to be acknowledged—I hope—I trust—I *believe* not."

Harriet bowed her head, and muttered some inaudible words expressive of her happiness in receiving a visit from Mrs. Middleton.

"Do not misunderstand me," said her guest with a severity provoked by her demeanour. "I am not here to make any attempt to replace in society a person who has withdrawn from its precincts. I am come to offer a retreat to guilt and penitence, not to countenance infamy. I have a mission from the husband you have deserted,—from Mr. Tomkins."

"Do me the favour to say at once to what I am indebted for this honour,—unexpected certainly, and allow me to say, not sought," replied Mrs. Tomkins with much of her usual arrogance.

"To my friendship for your mother,—to my desire to save a fellow creature from utter ruin," said Mrs. Middleton with dignity. "Terms are

offered to you, through me, by Mr. Tomkins, which at least afford you the power of living, in your own country, in that retirement most coveted by the penitent;—and it would indeed be grievous to think, that one whom I myself had ushered into this eastern world, so full of hope and promise, persisted in guilt,—neither repenting nor desiring to repent!"

"And what are those terms?" said Harriet bitterly.

"That, proceeding to the Presidency, you will embark immediately for England, and reside there on a small estate, which he will secure to you, in retirement, and I trust, penitence."

"And, in the event of my accepting these conditions, he lays aside, I presume, all thought of divorcing me?" inquired Harriet scornfully.

"No—that is not amongst his conditions," said Mrs. Middleton, irritated almost to asperity by the arrogance of Harriet. "He has an honourable name in the world, and he desires not that it should be holden by any who have tainted it."

"He judges well," said Harriet proudly, "and I at least am not fallen so low as to desire to keep it. When the law, therefore, shall have disallowed my claims on him, his charity proffers me a shelter?"

"Not so," said Mrs. Middleton mildly; "on the contrary, he is desirous that you should be beyond the reach of that odium which malice, and perhaps even outraged virtue, will heap on your name. Do him the justice of believing, that no man so wronged has ever been so merciful."

"And what will his mercy profit me?" said Harriet in an agony of bitterness. "Will it shield me from one bad consequence of my fall? —Will it give me the protection of a *name*?— Can it restore me to the consideration I have lost?—Will you,—be I as penitent as the Magdalene,—will *you* take me by the hand, and say, —'she has sinned and suffered, but welcome her, for she will sin no more.'"

Mrs. Middleton was silent, for she had no words to utter in the passion of that moment.

"No—no—" said Harriet rising with the

air and attitude of a sibyl;—"you will not do this. You will preach cold words, but you will not give me the comfort of substantial charity. I know you all,—this world and I have read each other well;—for me there is but one single flower in the arid desert of life, and that blows near Seymour. I will *not* leave him; you can proffer me nothing in exchange for *him*."

"Nothing!" said Mrs. Middleton with solemnity, but touched beyond measure at the utter abandonment of the impassioned being before her. "Is escape from guilt nothing?—Is it nothing to have time and opportunity to redeem by repentance your sin, so far as it may be redeemable?—Is it nothing," she added in a lower voice, "is it nothing to avoid the possibility of bringing into the world innocents, whose inheritance is their mother's shame?"

Harriet covered her face with her hands, but she did not weep. It seemed as if the blessed relief of a tear were denied her. Mrs. Middleton had touched almost the only chord which still vibrated to womanly feeling;—but her re-

solution was not shaken ;—she still resolved to cling to Seymour, and when she separated from the friend of her mother's youth, she felt that they had parted for ever.

Mr. Tomkins sought not that redress which the code of modern honour prescribes. He felt that to deprive of life the man who had inflicted this injury, or to be murdered by him, would afford no compensation for the wrongs he had sustained. In compassion, he had offered to the being he had once cherished in fondness and in pride, an asylum which might have preserved her from making necessity the plea of guilt, but this was refused, and to *him* henceforwards she was as though she had never been. At the tribunal of his country, he sought and obtained a legal separation from her, and under his circumstances a divorce was easy of attainment. He quitted India a free if not a happy man, whilst the unfortunate Harriet still remains there, subject to the caprice of a man who was prompted to her undoing by no worthier motive than vanity, and who, having accomplished his unholy end, regarded his union with her but

as a necessary evil. An outcast from society,—disowned by the mother whose precepts had operated to this disgraceful end,—the unhonoured wife of a vain and fickle man,—Harriet is doomed to a protracted residence in a country she abhors, with the additional pang of feeling, that those whom she so much despised,—*the English in India*,—do not deem her a meet associate for their wives and daughters.

Contrasting the career of Florence with her own, blinded by that self-love which leads us to trace all our errors to any source but our own weak or vicious principles, she attributes all the blessings, all the unexpected splendour of *her* lot,—all the infamy, the obscurity of her own,—to early impressions. "If," thought she in her desolate solitude, "I had been taught, as she was, that the happiness of human beings is greatly in their own power;—that misery is produced more frequently by impatience under adversity than by the thing itself;—that ambition—wealth—distinction—cannot satisfy the heart which yearns for ever after something

correspondent to itself;—that feeling, unrestrained by prudence, from the blessing it was meant to be, becomes a curse;—that passion is "but a light that leads astray,"—that the part of woman is endurance,—her security, submission;—if I had been taught all this, should not I too have been happy—yea, honoured? In no natural gifts was I inferior to her;—they were perverted—oh woe is me!—by the precepts,—the example,—of the mother who disowns me!"

And Mrs. Albany *did* desert her guilty child. When Mrs. Middleton returned to England, she exerted every effort to prevail on the injudicious parent to write to her unfortunate daughter some words of pardon and peace. But Mrs. Albany could not forgive the disappointment of her ambitious hopes. She could not, she said, act in such a manner as might encourage her younger daughters to be equally imprudent;—the necessity of preserving appearances had been one of the first lessons she had inculcated on her children, and she would never overlook Mrs. Seymour's shameful

disregard of them. All intercourse between her and the Middletons soon ceased, for habit will not in all cases form a bond strong enough to resist the opposition of taste and sentiment.

When Colonel and Mrs. Middleton rejoined Florence in England, they found her the idol of the house of her father-in-law,—the adored wife of her husband. The mother of two lovely children, she turned from all the attractions with which the homage of rank and fashion tempted her footsteps, to the heartfelt blessings of domestic life, finding therein the felicity she bestowed. But it was long before the gloom cast over her spirit by the sin of Harriet, her well-remembered and beautiful companion,—whose entrance into life had been marked by auspices far more brilliant than her own,—yielded to the influence of her personal and overflowing happiness.

THE WILL.

THE WILL.

CHAPTER I.

It was the drear and dark midnight in deep winter. In the outer world a tempest was raging fearfully, and its hoarse breath was heard amongst the old trees, and against the ancient casements of a house as ancient. The majestic oak was torn up by the roots, and whole forests of humbler shrubs were laid prostrate. It was a night to be much remembered, and the neighbouring villagers to this date relate, in whispers, stories of the dread forms that were seen to wander about in that dismal season. It was, in truth, a fitting time for the crowned king of terrors to walk abroad over the earth, upon whose fair face the shadow of desolation was falling. The danger that was hovering around was like him—that ghostly monarch—imaginable, indeed, but how terrifically obscure!

In an inner chamber of that ancient house a fire burned on the hearth, and cheerful lights might have dispersed aught of sadness or gloom from any spot less dark than that on which the destroying angel had planted his foot. The lord of the mansion was approaching his last hour, and in his inmost heart there was a voice that cried,—"*there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked!*"

"Has Mr. Jones been sent for,—is he coming?" he asked of the tall and stately man, just in the prime of manhood, who bent over him to catch the faintest whisper of his lips.

"A messenger has been dispatched; doubtless he will be here without delay," he replied, soothingly. "And in the meantime, my dear uncle, perhaps it would quiet you,—it would tranquillize your spirit,—if the final signature were affixed to this deed, which will put your worldly affairs in the posture you would wish, and ——"

"No more—no more, Andrew! It cannot be,—I will not! Let me first see Mr. Jones—let me ask—I doubt—I doubt—and my soul's

safety is suspended on the issue of that doubt!"

His impatient auditor bit his lips, but the groans—the struggles—of the dying man were so terrific, that even *he* was awed into silence.

It was long before either regained calmness. "Give me my medicine," said the sick man. "Is Doctor King still here?"

"He is;—will you see him now?"

"No,—if I am worse,—if I am speechless,—call him, Andrew. I have done much for you, and through you; see that you leave me not in my extremity."

"I will not, uncle;—trust me, I will remain by you to the last."

"I do believe you, Andrew; I doubt you nothing, my most prudent nephew," returned the old man, a gleam of his accustomed sarcasm lighting his dying eye. "You will stay until all is safe,—but you mock yourself, Andrew; mark me, I do not deceive you. You will gain nothing from me. Let the *law* take its course, and redeem me from the penalties

of disobeying the grand injunction of the *gospel*, —*to forgive*."

"You wrong me,—you do, indeed, Sir! I ask nothing from you that can injure the claims of my more fortunate, but I will not scruple to say, less obedient cousin. I seek not to infringe the rights of Alvaley, albeit there are many who consider that his most disgraceful marriage has brought such shame on his ancient and honourable name, as scarcely leaves his family any alternative but to renounce him——."

"Your mother was not renounced."

Mr. Stewart—Andrew, as he had been called —bit his lip; for when he asserted his claims to family consideration, he was careful to remember only his mother, and the remark of his uncle struck him most painfully.

"I would not leave you destitute, Andrew," resumed the sufferer,—"if there were time, I would put your claims beyond the reach of litigation. But as it is, there is a letter for Edmund Alvaley in my cabinet, and I know

the boy well; he will obey its injunctions to the very letter; he will take care of your welfare."

"Pardon me, sir," said Mr. Stewart, with a sigh; "I can owe nothing to Mr. Alvaley. I prefer destitution."

"What do you ask of me?" said the old man, with an energy that rendered his bodily weakness more appalling. "Have I not yet sinned enough, prompted by your ever ready voice? When my anger was dying,—and it would have died,—were you not careful to fan the smouldering flame, by reporting the virulence with which he and that poor girl, his wife, spoke of me. And her letter—her letter, begging for assistance—for bread for her boy—her new-born boy—my brother's grandchild—did not you win on me to reply to it with taunts and revilings?—to mock her with the offer of providing for that babe, if *she* would give him up for ever? And she said,—yes, Andrew,—these were her words—"Never!—we will starve together!"

The old man clasped his hands, and his

words, in the depth of his agony, were smothered by sobs.

"Is Mr. Jones yet arrived?" he asked, when the paroxysm had subsided.

"I fear not; I will inquire,—I will send Hughes in the meantime."

"Ring; let him first come. I *will* not—*can* not be alone. Alas! alas!" he continued, as if addressing himself, "who will accompany me whither I am going? The grave is a solitary place,—and beyond——!"—A groan that appalled even the stout heart of his nephew, supplied the sentence.

The old servant of Mr. Alvaley obeyed the summons quickly, for he was stationed generally in the anti-room. "Is Mr. Jones arrived?" asked Andrew Stewart, fixing his eye expressively on the countenance of Hughes.

"He is not," replied Hughes, with a voice so sober and composed, that, contrasting as it did with the stormy emotions of his own mind, smote painfully on the ear of the sufferer.

"Ay—it is thus—ever thus! Our life and our death, of infinite worth to ourselves, moves

not a muscle in the frame of another,—awakes not one pulsation the more in hearts whose beatings are not numbered! Oh, for one month more,—to repent and to repair!"

"Dear sir, do not lament so much," said Hughes, with a persuasive voice;—"very few gentlemen have gone through life so blamelessly as your honour, though I say it that should not say it, seeing that I may be said to belong to your honour."

"Silence!" said his master sternly. "Keep your flatteries for the living; the dying shrinks from—abhors them. Truly, mine has been a blameless life! It is consoling to think how I fulfilled the precept of forgiveness—how I succoured Edmund Alvaley and his child! Swear that I did, Hughes; never scruple an oath now, old man; it is the last perjury your master will ask of you."

Hughes shuddered, and was speechless.

"Andrew, will Mr. Jones *never* arrive? Am I to die without one word of religious consolation? Am I not to learn of what avail is my repentance? I *do* repent! Witness THOU

above, that I repent! And you, Hughes,—mark me,—I leave no will; all is Edmund Alvaley's; I bequeath Andrew Stewart,—you,—every body—to his care; tell him so. I will make no other testament."

"Heaven forbid that I should importune you at this afflicting moment," said Stewart, earnestly bending down to the dying couch. "Yet oh, let me implore you, as I have never in word or deed disobeyed you, not to be left to the mercy of my enemy. The instrument is already prepared, which will secure me a decent competence. Your signature only, my uncle and benefactor, is needed. The lawyer and his clerk are without, and —"

"Stay," said the old man, raising his head from his pillow, his eyes glaring fiercely on his nephew; "this is beyond even *my* expectation! I have watched you narrowly, Andrew Stewart; I know you thoroughly, and listen to my words as if they were my last! I will sign nothing! Hear you, Hughes, and mark!—As you hope for a quiet death-bed,—you see before you what it is to die!—tell Edmund Alvaley *all is*

his! Let him do what he will with it; I make restitution! I will sign nothing!—I make no will, by all I shrink from meeting!"

He gasped; his eyes, distended to their utmost size, were fixed; he fell back; and the death-rattle smote on the ears of his companions. They looked fearfully on him, and on each other, and for a time they trembled.

When the sun rose that morning, the stillness around betokened that death was in the house. At the first dawn of day Mr. Browne and his clerk, the law-agents of the deceased, were seen to quit the mansion, and the neighbourhood were convinced that the will, whatever might be its nature, had been executed at the last moment. Edmund Alvaley had many friends amongst the tenants, and they shook their heads with a boding sigh, when they knew that Andrew Stewart had stood by the death-bed of his uncle.

CHAPTER II.

"TO EDMUND ALVALEY, ESQ.

"DEAR SIR,

"I hasten to apprise you, that my lamented friend and client, Edmund John Alvaley, Esq. of Alvaley House, Berkshire, departed this life last night, Tuesday, 22d instant. I regret to be under the painful necessity of informing you, that your claims, as heir at law, have been nullified by the last will and testament of my said respected client, the late Edmund John Alvaley, Esq., the title to all his estates, real and personal, being vested in his nephew, the issue of his only sister Margaret,—to wit, Andrew Stewart, Esq. By virtue of the power assigned to me,

I shall open the last will and testament of the said Edmund John Alvaley, Esq., on the 24th instant, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, that his executors may be apprised of, and carry into effect, his desires and intentions regarding his funeral. I hereby, therefore, apprise you of the same, requesting that you will be present either by self or by deputy, to witness the breaking of the seals, and to learn more minutely the contents of the said last will and testament of the said late Edmund John Alvaley, Esq., of Alvaley House, Berkshire.

" I am, dear Sir,

" Your obedient servant,

" JAMES BROWNE."

Abingdon, 23d April, 18—

It was not the first perusal of this important letter which put the unfortunate young man to whom it was addressed, in possession of its contents. He read it a second and a third time, and the colour left his cheeks, and large drops ran down his forehead. A fair and

lovely woman, with a sleeping child in her arms, gazed earnestly and anxiously on his agitated countenance, but it was some time before she ventured to speak, and then she did but breathe his name in the gentlest accents.

He looked at her, and burst into tears.

"My husband!" she said, gazing in agony at his distress. "Let no misfortune shake you thus!—surely we have felt the worst, and it is not new to us to suffer—beloved Edmund, speak to me!"

He rose and clasped in his arms the young mother and her child. "Call forth your courage, my own admirable wife," said he, when he could speak. "It is not new to us to suffer, but henceforwards we have done with hope!"

"Nay," said the wife, gently but firmly, returning that fond caress, "hope is never lost by those who fear God."

"Edith," said he with tender solemnity, effectually endeavouring to subdue his strong emotion, "that you have not only suffered with me, but sustained me, I thankfully,

proudly, yea, even at this terrible moment, *proudly* acknowledge. But great as our trials have been, we have been hitherto cheered —have we not?—by the prospect of a brighter day? We have recalled all the early fondness of my uncle for his acknowledged heir, and we have dreamed that he could not always be obdurate!—We have looked at our child, and thought, oh heaven, how vain have been those thoughts!"

And the unhappy husband, in speechless agony, buried his face in the bosom of his wife and wept aloud.

She shuddered slightly, but after a short silence, when in the depths of her own heart she had resigned the disposal of herself to the Supreme and regardful Father of his creatures, she resumed her wonted composure.

"Alvaley, does your uncle live?" she said gently, judging well that but from one source could grief so bitter as his flow.

"He is dead!" said Alvaley slowly, but gathering his firmness, and he placed the fatal letter in her hands.

She read it once and again, as if to gather the sense of each cold word, and as she concluded, she bent over her fair boy, and hid her face for a few seconds on his bright brow. Perhaps a tear fell on him, perhaps the heaving of her bosom disturbed him, for the child moved, and his opening eye rested with sleepy smilingness on his mother, and anon he slept again, as he heard her whispered lullaby. She pressed him more closely to her, and she felt,—as mothers *do* feel,—a presage of future happiness, as his breast heaved gently against hers in his blissful slumber.

"As God wills, so be it!" said Edith. "We have at least health, hands, and heads, Alvaley, and we must bestir ourselves. This last bereavement is hardly so injurious as the cruel kindness which cherished you too fondly to give you a profession, and that best blessing, independence."

"I am ready and willing for any labour, Edith, of head or hands," returned Alvaley. "But our child, our darling boy,—my heart is indeed wrung when I view him,—the heir of

vast possessions, and *now* born to poverty so entire as this!"

"Who shall venture to say for what a mortal is born?—who shall dare to predict the destiny any human creature is to fulfil?" said Edith with energy. "From the sad memory of your own disappointments, learn the lessons of hope for your boy; gather honey from the dead lion. Cradled in luxury,—surrounded with splendour,—what did your nurses, think you, foretell of *your* future career?—Did they dream that, in seven years, you would be the houseless orphan of a prodigal father and a broken-hearted mother? View the second page of your life,—the petted plaything of the uncle whose heir you were,—your sports performed amidst a landscape whose rich acres were one day to be your own,—your nights sheltered by a noble roof that was to hail you *lord*. And *now*—those wide domains,—that ancient hall,—where are they?"——Alvaley groaned.——"No, my husband;—let us not despond;—let not Providence instruct in vain."

"At least I have *you*," said Alvaley, fondly encircling in his arms the two sole beings dear

to him in the creation. "*You* are the hostages of fortune."

"The pledges that heaven will not desert the unfortunate, rather," said Edith. "But now, it behoves you to decide whether you will be present at the opening of this terrible will; if so, time presses."

"Enter the halls of Alvaley, and Stewart its master!" said Alvaley shrinking. "Edith, my beloved, you do not advise this,—you do not think it necessary."

"Our child's dearest interests,—*worldly* interests, I mean,—are involved," said the mother; "hard as the trial may be, surely you will not shrink from your duty."

"Is there no means of escaping this trial?" said Alvaley. "When last I met Stewart, I was your happy bridegroom, Edith, —his triumphant rival,—and if in anger with my uncle, not discarded. And *now!*—oh no, no!—I cannot—I *dare* not meet Andrew Stewart, the master of Alvaley."

Edith's brow saddened. Her high and composed spirit was not accessible to these inferior emotions; and, perhaps, there was some-

thing painful even in the compassion she felt for the trouble of her husband's less sustained mind.

" If it must be so," she said thoughtfully, " we will try my brother. Henry will be true to us as ourselves;—yes,—I will write to him instantly," and placing her boy on his couch in the care of his attendant, she prepared and despatched the note.

Its contents were of such a nature as to bring her brother instantly to her side. " Well Alvaley," said he, when he had read Mr. Browne's letter, " the worst has fallen that *can* befall;"—I sincerely pity you, but that can do no good?—I should pity Edith too, but she does not need it. The boy—we must win a fortune for him amongst us. And Alvaley, you must *work ;*—an idle gentleman without a penny cannot possibly maintain a wife and child. No profession!—the most consummate folly a parent can be guilty of, be he Crœsus himself, is to educate a son to idleness. Thank heaven, I was not born to a fortune!—I have now briefs enough *in esse*, and *in futurum esse*, to find me bread and cheese, these coming three months, without the necessity of

fagging for the periodical press. Let me talk, Edith; it does Alvaley good, and does not retard business,—I will leave London to-morrow morning, time enough to arrive at Alvaley House at the proper hour. Lawyers are always punctual. Where is the boy? Asleep!—God bless him!—Edith, if you shed a tear, I must decamp, or I shall weep too!"

"You are the kindest of brothers, the best of friends," she said, and she spake truly.

"And the most affectionate of uncles," he returned. "I have forsworn marriage; depend on it I shall get a fortune, if I live long enough. But Alvaley, what are you to do with yourself?—You have been feeding on hope too long already. You must enter on another method of procuring sustenance without delay. If the unforgiving old gentleman had but bequeathed you sufficient to wipe out those pounds, shillings, and pence mementos of youthful follies,—your debts!"

"Surely Edmund's creditors will wait, when they see him exerting himself to repay them," said Edith, earnestly.

"It is *possible*," said Henry Dormer thought-

fully; "but some of those people have hearts composed of no common materials. They will neither bend nor melt. However we will see what can be done. I can give everything but money;—'quod peto da, Caii; non peto consilium.' Learning Latin has been of some use to you, Edith; it has enabled you to smile even now. But, Alvaley, you must up and be doing, man."

"*I will*," said he, firmly; "*to beg I am ashamed, but I will learn to dig.* Edith shall never have to blush for her husband."

"I honour you," said Dormer, shaking him heartily by the hand. "I expected no less from you. But to what can you betake yourself? No profession! And literature, *per se*, is such a dubious trade. Hapless indeed is he whose daily bread depends on the press! It may employ your leisure hours; it will add to your resources; I read your pamphlet on the 'Abolition of Slavery Bill' with pleasure.—Persevere; but do not trust to the press."

"Shew me what I *can* do," said Alvaley.

" Never hesitate, man ; I shall not shrink from a name."

" My old friend and schoolfellow, Jenkins, is now one of his father's firm," said Dormer, but he rather lowered his voice as he spoke. " Their confidential clerk is just dead, and they want one to supply his place. Can you be content, for a while, to devote yourself to learning the details of a banking-house ? A few weeks will enable you to master them, and a competent salary will reward your toils."

" *I can,—I will,*" said Alvaley, and he was overpaid for his victory over himself—his pride of ancient blood—when he felt the grateful kiss of his wife, and knew that she appreciated him.

" That is noble," said Henry Dormer. " I think I may venture to depend on Jenkins's closing with my proposals. I have dreamt of this contingency before. Lawyers have the habit of looking a little beyond their nose. Now, Alvaley, give me a note to this Mr. Browne, to authorize my appearance at the breaking of the seals of this terrible will. A

line will do.——Now, good night; kiss the boy for me. Depend on the blessing of Providence *when* you put your own shoulder to the wheel. Be as cheerful as you can, and expect me here at this hour to-morrow."

CHAPTER III.

At ten o'clock on the following morning, Henry Dormer was at the door of Alvaley House. In a few minutes he found himself in the library with Mr. Browne, the attorney.

"An unpleasant business this," said the latter, after exchanging the usual greetings. "A very unpleasant business, Mr. Dormer."

"For *my* client, I presume you mean," replied Dormer. "The residuary legatee seldom finds the opening of a will very disagreeable."

"A most unexpected testamentary disposition," continued Mr. Browne, with an air of being sociable.

"I believe so," replied Dormer, concisely, for he had a professional acquaintance with his companion, and cherished a most inveterate dislike to him.

"There is no calculating how a man's property will be devised whilst he lives," persisted Mr. Browne.

Mr. Dormer of course acquiesced.

"It is to be regretted that Mr. Alvaley was not in attendance on the last moments of his uncle," resumed Mr. Browne.

"And the rather," added Dormer, "as his presence might have gone far to prevent a will's being made *at all;* this, I apprehend, was executed at the last moment of existence."

"Precisely," said Mr. Browne, and Dormer felt, without understanding, the untranslateable expression of his eye.

"Of course it is a well authenticated document."

"The fault is mine if it be not," said Browne, with a smile of complacency, for he valued himself on his professional accuracy.

"Pray, who attested the deed?"

"Myself,—my clerk,—and the testator's confidential servant, Hughes."

"Ha!" said Dormer thoughtfully, "I thought Mr. Alvaley would hardly have been contented

without procuring the signature of more responsible persons; of course I except yourself."

"They were not easily procurable on the emergency," said Mr. Browne, with a correct air.

"Then you were in the house, I presume, —waiting until called for."

"Exactly; I had had a hint———"

"So I supposed. But surely Dr. King, the old and friendly medical attendant of the deceased, would have been a more appropriate person."

"He happened to be attending a distant patient."

"Not having been favoured with the same hints as yourself, I presume."

"Really I cannot say. Excuse me; you gentlemen of the bar are so used to cross-examinations, that a friendly tête-à-tête generally lapses into the character of one," said Mr. Browne, affecting to be jocose,—an effort in which he succeeded so ill as to be thankful that the door opened, at this juncture, to admit Mr. Andrew Stewart, exhibiting a countenance most decorously woe-begone.

The residuary legatee received the representative of the heir-at-law with becoming courtesy. Very little was said on either side. Mr. Dormer was collected, and observant; Mr. Stewart aimed at melancholy composure, but the acute barrister thought he discerned the existence of less tranquil feelings under that smooth exterior, and he noticed especially an occasional action in the muscles of the mouth,—an accidental respiration heavier than usual,—which were quite sufficient to keep his vigilance on the alert.

In the presence of the proper persons the will was read, containing all the circumlocutions and accumulations of words observable in legal documents. It was drawn up in a most lawyer-like style, doing credit to the legal acumen of Attorney Browne, who read it with a deliberate and well enunciated delivery. He came to a paragraph bequeathing Edmund Alvaley an annuity of one hundred and fifty pounds per annum, and he raised his voice, as a man does who imagines he has that to promulgate which will be highly satisfactory to

some amongst his audience. But, unexpected as this legacy was, Mr. Dormer's countenance relaxed not from its grave and observant serenity. Browne looked at him over the parchment, but he could not discern a single gleam of satisfaction in his austerely composed eye.

It was over, and Dormer perceived that the deed was complete in all its forms. He made no remark, requesting only that a copy might be sent to his chambers in Gray's Inn, and declining the proffered refreshment, left the house.

But instead of returning immediately to London, he turned his horse's head to the neighbouring village, and sought the residence of Doctor King, with whom he had a very slight acquaintance.

The Doctor was at home, and the visitor, of course, was admitted.

" I am glad to see you, sir, but allow me to express the disinterested hope that you do not seek me professionally," said Doctor King kindly. " Mrs. Alvaley's brother;—she and I are old friends, Mr. Dormer;—you are welcome,

sir. Edmund Alvaley,—how does he under this sudden extinction of his fortunes?"

"He bears himself as a man should," said Dormer, accepting a proffered seat. "And yet it *is* a grievous misfortune to one of his young years, with a wife and child to share his bereavements."

"Assuredly. I protest to you nothing ever astonished me more than the information that there was a will in existence. I heard it from Mr. Browne only the day after Mr. Alvaley's death, and although he was unquestionable authority to any man in his senses, mine were so shaken by the intelligence, that I could hardly credit it."

"Mr. Browne says it was made just before his death; a singular fact, that having procrastinated the punishment of his unfortunate nephew's fault so long, he should inflict it in that awful hour when man is so impressively taught the great lesson of forgiveness."

"I assure you," said the Doctor, "I have not yet overcome my astonishment. Mr. Alvaley has been so many years my patient, and

we have ever been on such friendly terms, that I cannot conceive why he declared to me intentions of so opposite a nature. Indeed, I always believed that his show of resentment against Edmund was maintained rather with a view to his own consistency of character, than because his anger continued unsubdued. You know his eccentric temper. Having once declared that he never would forgive his marriage with Miss Dormer, he deemed it due to himself not to depart from the letter of his declaration."

"Then he *did* give you reason to suppose that he would not disinherit my brother-in-law?"

"He has repeatedly assured me that he never would make a will,—that Edmund had reaped the reward of his disobedience, in having been thrown on his own resources since his marriage, and that, whilst he lived, he never would give him the smallest assistance. But you are probably aware, that he had a strong feeling for hereditary rights; and I own, I would have staked much on the persuasion

that Edmund, the son of his only brother, would have been as surely his successor, as if the estates had been entailed."

"And this persuasion was paramount in your mind, even up to the period of your last visit to him?"

"Decidedly. How Mr. Stewart wrought on him, I cannot, nor perhaps does it become me, to conjecture. It is greatly to be regretted, that he persisted in refusing to allow Alvaley to be sent for,—a measure which I often requested him to permit."

"Have you any suspicion, if the question be fair, that his intellects were at all impaired during his last illness?"

"Decidedly not," said Dr. King, firmly. "On the contrary, it is my fixed opinion that they were not shaken to the last moment. His disease was not of a nature that was likely to affect them."

"I fear there is no possibility of setting aside this fatal document," said Dormer, with a sigh. "Every form is perfect—duly attested;

but, by the way, who is Hughes, the confidential servant whose signature is one of the three that attest the deed?"

"An old and influential person,—always about his master,—born on his estate, and taken into his service when both were young. Hughes's character is unexceptionable. Doubtless he has profited by the situation he held, for that, you know, is human nature."

"Pray, how long has Mr. Stewart resided at Alvaley House?"

"He came down a month since,—as soon, indeed, as he heard of the serious illness of his kinsman. I suspect Hughes was his informant. His sober demeanour, as a boy, won the regard of his uncle's old servant, just in proportion as the frolic and boyish pranks of Edmund rendered him a perpetual source of trouble and annoyance to Hughes."

"If Stewart had won the hand of my sister, would Mr. Alvaley have been equally inexorable?"

"Doubtless; but the effects of his anger

would have been less palpable. It was so well understood, that Mr. Stewart was to have no more than a younger brother's portion, that if he had been left without any provision it would have excited little surprise. 'Equally inexorable!' Yes, my dear sir, you are well aware that old Mr. Alvaley never forgave your mother's bad taste in preferring your father to himself and his lands, and to engraft one of her children on his family-tree was certainly an offence, in his eyes, of the greatest magnitude. He was made of stern stuff, sir; but the very rigour of his consistency renders it inexplicable to me, that he should, at the last hour of life, execute a will so repugnant to his reiterated declarations."

"Perhaps you have heard, that an annuity of one hundred and fifty pounds is bequeathed to Edmund; a special mark of animosity, you perceive, is here implied, against my sister and her children."

"That is not like old John Alvaley,—no, sir, that is not like him!" said the Doctor with

energy. "He was a man of strong resentments,—of obstinate resolutions,—but incapable of *small* malice,—of the unutterable littleness of revenge discernible in such an act. That is," continued the physician more calmly, "I should so have judged; I should not have hesitated, if called on, to declare that such was my opinion. Facts, you see, would contradict me."

Dormer bowed, and after a few inconsequential remarks, retired.

"The worst is true," said Dormer to Alvaley and his wife, when he visited them after his journey. "Stewart may be said to have all. A few legacies to servants,—a few rings to old friends,—and an annuity of a hundred and fifty pounds to Edmund,—form the exceptions."

"Thank God for that!" said Edith, gratefully raising her eyes. "That at least saves us from starvation."

"Starvation!" said Dormer. "Why, child, am I nobody in your eyes? Have you no brother? Or, in the short commons to which you have been pleased to allude, was I to have been a sharer?"

She smiled on him, and notwithstanding their disappointments, the spirits of the trio, as they supped together that evening, if serious, were not sad.

CHAPTER IV.

ALVALEY, the well-born, the highly educated, now took his daily post in the banking-house of Messrs. Jenkins, Son, and Co. His composure astonished even himself. Compelled to chain his faculties down to the business before him, he enjoyed his hours of relaxation so keenly that he would not allow their pleasantness to be disturbed by the indulgence of regrets for what he had lost. Edith became even cheerful. Her boy bloomed in his joyous infancy, and her brother, the excellent Dormer, passed with them every hour he could steal from the pursuit of his laborious profession. She began to experience a truth of which she had hardly thought, that the human mind accommodates itself to great vicissitudes much more readily than those who reflect little, imagine. She had

so many occupations, that she had no time to dwell on what *might* have been. She did not bewilder herself with shaping, "probable circumstances in impossible situations." Alvaley was more than tranquil; he was even vivacious, and that added considerably to her felicity. To be sure, sometimes they looked on their boy and shed a silent tear over the blighting of his prospects, whilst he, in his happy unconsciousness, smiled on their sorrow. But Dormer's equal and sustained cheerfulness,—the sunshine of a spirit at peace with itself,—infected them with its own brightness, and few would have deemed that this was the family of a man who had been known at the clubs,—received at Almack's,—pronounced an excellent speculation by scheming dowagers with daughters to dispose of,—and regretted as a severe loss for nine whole days, when his marriage with the orphan of a decayed gentleman was publicly announced. Sometimes Alvaley himself was surprised into a doubt of the identity of the individual, who had sustained two rôles so eminently different.

The great source of uneasiness now arose from the recollection of unpaid debts,—the irresistible monitors that forced on Alvaley the conviction of that said identity. It is true, his creditors had agreed to receive the amount due by easy instalments, and his punctuality in the payment had been scrupulous. Still he was in their power; and the caprice of one, or the death of another, might place him in a position, which would involve those dearest to him in sufferings, to which all they had hitherto sustained was light in the comparison.

But months wore away;—he had received his first year's annuity;—had paid to every creditor his allotted quota;—all seemed secure. His anxiety decreased, and he devoted much of his leisure to those literary pursuits which added to his means of releasing himself from the demands against him, but which, to be successfully followed, imperiously required mental composure. It was, therefore, doubly pitiable, that a legal notice should be served on him to pay a sum of six hundred and thirty pounds in fifteen days, or to abide the consequences.

Dormer did his best. He offered security, which was refused. He proffered part of the amount,—all he could command in the world,—which was rejected. His efforts produced nothing but the discovery, that some secret influence was employed against Alvaley, and this discovery was of no possible advantage. In fine, Alvaley was a prisoner in the King's Bench.

And now all the fortitude—all the unshaken faith—all the calm loftiness—of Edith's mind hardly sufficed to sustain her under this terrible calamity. Of what avail were the brightest traits of her husband's character under such cruel circumstances? What did it profit him that he had overcome the prejudices of birth, of habit, of education,—had consented to lay aside the privileges of a gentleman, and accept the humble office of a banker's clerk,—was willing to earn his daily bread by daily toil, and appropriate the residue to the just and honest payment of every debt he had contracted? By the operation of that most unwise law which leaves the liberty of the unfortunate

debtor at the mercy of a vindictive creditor, he was deprived of that liberty which was essential to the prosecution of his labours. This relic of the barbarism of the past,—this power of incarceration,—militating against the interests of the very individuals who exert it,—in all cases when the sufferer is honest, can be only an instrument of oppression. It is a confounding of misfortune with crime. It is a compulsive substitution of indolence for activity—of passive endurance for the exertions that might retrieve former errors or calamities. Edith felt the evil in its whole frightful extent. Young, possessing a beauty exceeding the loveliness of woman in general,—gifted with talents that might have adorned any station,—with accomplishments that must have embellished the luxuries of the highest,—she betook herself to the shelter of a prison-roof, resolute to cheer her less resigned husband with her perpetual presence. There the boy—by birth-right the heir of vast possessions—passed his infant hours, and in that drear abode first learnt to call his parents by those tender names, the utterance of which

is an epoch in the little lives of those most blessed, and most attaching, of created things.

Alvaley drooped daily. Conscious that his efforts at independence had deserved success, the indignation which had for a little sustained him, gradually gave way to present depression and the most gloomy forebodings of the future. In vain Edith exhibited her serene composure, and inculcated the duty of patient submission to an inevitable evil;—in vain Dormer talked with a gaiety he felt not;—it seemed as if the spring of his mind were broken. He gazed on his boy in silent dejection, or he reverted to the loss of his birth-right claims with bitter indignation at the unappeasable anger, which had retained its cruel desire of revenge, even at the last awful moment of life. Edith felt in this sad affliction, the full terrors of the stroke that had smitten them. But hers was not a spirit to shrink when relief might be procured by exertion. She resolved herself to see the rigorous creditor, and discover whether he were alike inaccessible to representations addressed to his reason, and the appeals to his compassion.

Mr. Bates was one of those people who are born to make a fortune by an undeviating attention to pounds, shillings, and pence, and are blest with a resolution to achieve a certain sum at every risk, and despite of every contingency. By dint of saving and calculating,—of attending very much to small things, and speculating only when the chances of failure were infinitely small in comparison with those of success,—he had attained that great object of a citizen's ambition—*a plum*. What, however, was at first choice had now become habit, and though the end and aim of Mr. Bates's early existence was accomplished, he continued still to toil, and speculate, and save, as perseveringly as in the outset of his fortunate career. He had never taken unto himself a wife, for, as he said, he had been too busy all his life either to feel love or to feign it,—and moreover, wives were expensive articles who, if they brought a man a fortune, generally knew pretty well how to spend it. He had, to be sure, occasionally a kind of perspective vision of a snug box at Hackney, or some such ultimate region, where

a buxom dame, to be endowed with all the rights, privileges, and immunities of Mrs. Bates, was to watch over his declining years, mix his nightly posset, and lull him to sleep by the repetition of all the gossip she had collected during the day,—a recreation to which Mr. Bates, in every short interval of leisure, was considerably addicted. As to sentiment, he was not lexiocographer enough to be aware of the existence of the word, and the feeling was quite as unknown to him as any material object west of Temple Bar.

The den in which this animal pursued the necessary avocations of eating, drinking, and sleeping, was situated somewhere in the unapproachable regions of Fenchurch-street, and thither Edith ordered the hackney-coachman to drive her, without whose aid it would have been impossible for her to have threaded the mazes that led to it, even under the influence of the light of a midsummer's day, far less in the shadow of a November morning, veiled in a fog so thick that she could not see the heads of the wretched horses who were dragging her along.

Unaccustomed to consider the habits of men of business, Edith did not appreciate the full extent of her good fortune in finding Mr. Bates at home at that hour,—a thing which probably did not occur once in a year,—and which was the result now of a circumstance of singular coincidence, to which we shall have occasion to refer hereafter.

Edith was shewn into a little dark parlour, twelve feet square, in which the objects were hardly visible by the light admitted through six very dirty panes of glass, and from the smallest possible quantity of ignited coal in the smallest possible grate.

Mr. Bates was sitting in a dusky-looking easy chair, thumbing a newspaper, the marvellously unpleasant odour arising from which indicated, to nostrils more experienced than those of his present visitant, that it was a loan from the nearest public-house. He raised his small eyes, peering far above the two mountains of flesh which answered in his countenance the purpose of cheeks,—examined his guest with a sharp scrutinizing glance, such as at the first

view his features seemed incapable of expressing,—then apparently satisfied with the result, he half rose from his chair, by way of salutation, and began the conference.

"Take a seat, ma'am, take a seat. Can't say I recollect ever to have seen you before. Perhaps I may though, for all that. Something else to do than to remember faces. Yours is pretty enough too,—no offence,—no offence. Pray what is your name? People should always tell their names to the woman that shews 'em into my parlour."

"My name is Alvaley, the wife of ——"

"Oh,—ay, ay,—see it all now. Yes, yes, clear enough; the wife of the man in gaol; can't pay his debts. Bad practice for people to go in debt; can't pay, don't have. Wish some folks acted up to that. Not your fault, I dare say; wild young fellow, I hear; more's the pity; sorry for *you*, sorry for *you*. Can't help it though; can't afford to lose money; must be paid, you know; how else pay taxes and all those things?—eat me up,—eat me up."

"But we ask only for time," said Mrs. Alvaley, taking the offered chair, and listening quietly to his rambling harangue. "You are not the more likely to be paid by placing my husband in a situation where he cannot exert himself to repay you."

"I waited a long time,—got nothing,—got tired though," said Mr. Bates, unbuttoning his coat, and putting a hand in each waistcoat-pocket. "Tired of waiting, and promises, and all that. Thought he was heir to the Alvaley estate—shouldn't have advanced him a penny else without better security than his bond. All a hum,—did me there,—shan't forget that in a hurry,—hate to be bit. Can't pay in purse, pay in person,—that's my rule; nobody pay else."

"I assure you," said Mrs. Alvaley, whose hopes waned considerably, as the genius of Mr. Bates thus displayed itself to her unaccustomed mind; "I assure you, that you are not more anxious to receive your money, than my husband is to pay it. He is willing to bind

himself to give you a certain instalment yearly, and my brother will be his and your security for the fulfilment of these terms."

"Bind himself? Suppose he breaks his word; who's the fool then? Have all the trouble of catching him over again. Brother give security!—not worth that!" snapping his fingers. "No houses, no lands, no funds, no furniture!—Poh! poh!—pity you lost your morning's labour; trying to catch old birds with chaff, won't do, I tell you, won't do."

"If you have any feeling of compassion,—if you are a man, hear me!" said Mrs. Alvaley, and the tears streamed from her large and eloquent eyes as she spoke. "My husband has not wherewithal to pay you; give him liberty, and his industry will put it in his power gradually, and oh! how gratefully and cheerfully! to return you all you have lent. Continue to imprison him, and death will release him and defraud you. His heart is breaking."

Bates looked at the young wife earnestly, and his countenance began to be agitated by

certain convulsive movements, that afforded Edith greater hope than she had yet ventured to indulge.

" Sorry for you—sorry for you, 'pon my soul. Wouldn't say so, if it wasn't the case. Men die out of gaol as well as in gaol;—may lose it either way. People say I'm rich;—all a hum;—got hardly bread and cheese. Can't afford to give up a chance,—bird in hand worth two in bush. Shan't be much of a loser as it is;—took care of that;—tell you a trick or two worth knowing," said the city monster, with a mysterious look.

Edith's heart trembled as it admitted the new light just thrown upon her destiny. " If he die, you *must* lose all," she said, wishing to follow up his hint without putting him on his guard. " You cannot pursue the dead, and all that Alvaley has in the world, is holden by a life-tenure."

" Know that,—know all about it;—shan't lose, I tell you, if he dies to-morrow. Why don't you go to your husband's rich relation, Andrew Stewart? Got plenty;—will he pay

for you?—No, he won't, I can tell you. Cunning chap that;—doesn't forget and forgive. Doesn't wipe off old scores. Fine thing for him old Alvaley was of the same mind. Andrew Stewart behaved very well to me always;—don't mean to play him a scurvy trick. No, no;—it's no use talking, ma'am;—sorry for you, 'pon my soul. My word's my bond;—won't break it for any man. I have said young Alvaley shall die in a gaol, and he shall."

"Not if there be justice in heaven, or pity on earth!" said Edith slowly, and rising as she spoke. "I fear, sir, your desire of wealth has led you to do that which you may find inconvenient to justify even in this world. To imprison one man with a view of satisfying the revenge of another,—selling the liberty of your fellow-creature for the gold of his enemy,—cannot, I think, be very consonant to the laws of your country, even if you can reconcile it to your own conscience."

"Hoity-toity!" said Bates, taking snuff and looking with even more vulgar assurance than

before. "What's here to do about law and conscience, and selling liberty for gold?—Mind;—I have said nothing. I deny it all, and I defy you to take the law of me, for you have no witnesses!—Take the law!—take the law indeed!—go home, go home to your husband. What did he send you here for? Think me such a confounded fool as to be bamboozled by a woman? Old James Bates not to be caught so soon by the finest madam that walks. Talk to me of law indeed!—Give you plenty of law, if you like it. Soon have an action for libel against you too, if you don't mind what you're about."

"Mr. Bates," said Edith, with more dignity of manner than she had yet displayed, "I came here to ask of you a deed of mercy to my unfortunate husband, and whatever might be your decision, both the act and the motive should have been my security from insult of any kind. From your own admission, I gather that some sinister cause now operates in your unwise detention of Mr. Alvaley. Common prudence dictates, that you should allow him the benefit

of his liberty, even for the sake of that gold you so much value. You *know* he has exerted himself to the utmost to satisfy the claims of all his creditors, and yet you take advantage of the most pernicious of our laws to put him in such a situation as will disable him from making any exertions whatever. As it is, he has hardly wherewithal to procure sustenance for his wife and child."

"People should not have children who cannot provide for them, and there 's Malthus for you," said the horrible Mr. Bates with a chuckle.

Edith felt that she was wasting her efforts in an attempt at softening a rock. With a heavy sigh she was preparing to depart under the influence of Mr. Bates's very stormy countenance, when her progress was suddenly checked, and Andrew Stewart himself—tall, gloomy, and stern as usual—stalking into the midst of the apartment, that seemed hardly of dimensions sufficient to compose a strait waistcoat for his muscular frame, stood before her.

CHAPTER V.

Of the three individuals thus unexpectedly assembled in the little parlour of Mr. Bates, that person himself was the only one who preserved any tolerable composure, and even he evinced sundry manifestations of embarrassment; such as buttoning and unbuttoning his coat and waistcoat,—taking snuff,—plunging his hands into the unfathomable abyss of his pockets, and similar symptoms. He was, however, the first to speak.

"More than half an hour beyond your time; can't afford to throw away *mine;*—time's valuable to people who have money to get;—you, nothing to do but to spend. Don't envy you. Why did she let you in without coming to me

first? Got somebody here you see. Know each other, I suppose."

"Mrs. Alvaley!"

"Mr. Stewart," said Edith calmly, regaining her composure as the memory of the real character of Andrew Stewart instantly possessed her mind.

"You were going?—Will you allow me to offer you my carriage?—I will set you down anywhere."

"Allow me to remind you, that never having evinced any particular preference for your society, I cannot see any thing in recent circumstances that should change my sentiments."

"Can you not?" said Stewart with bitterness, but recollecting himself he softened his tone and added,—"perhaps when convinced of my sincere desire to serve you, you will condescend to endure my presence for a few hours."

"Probably,—*when* convinced of it," returned Edith sarcastically: "but I question whether the working of that miracle be within the compass of your eloquence."

"Pride *can* companion with poverty, it seems," returned Mr. Stewart with a sneer. "The wife of the imprisoned debtor, Alvaley, might have learnt to tame her haughty tongue, in my poor opinion."

"It *is* a poor,—a very wretched opinion," said Edith haughtily. "However, I am not here to squabble with you; until light and darkness mingle together, you and I can never stand on a level. I leave you to the companionship of your fitting associates. Good morning to you, Mr. Bates."

"By heaven, madam, you shall not quit me so triumphantly," said Stewart placing his back against the door. "I *will* speak, and I *will* be heard."

"Come, come," said Mr. Bates, who had listened with more attention than amazement; "fair play's a jewel. Mrs. Alvaley came here of her own free will, and she shall go the same. Englishman's house his castle. Won't have a prison made of mine."

"Troublesome folly!—I mean no harm,"

said Stewart angrily. "Leave us alone for a single quarter of an hour."

"Mr. Bates, I have no words to waste on yonder man," said Edith proudly, but with composure. "I desire you immediately to cause your door to be opened. You will have to answer for this, sir. How *dare* you venture to detain me here?"

"Go out of the way, Mr. Stewart," said Bates, making an effort to remove him from the door, for he began to entertain a certain apprehension of consequences. "I'll ring the bell, and call in the police,—will, by Jove!—my word's my bond.—The young woman shan't be kept against her will. Doesn't like you,—can see that, plain enough. No great cause, you and I know.—No more fun of this kind;—won't stand it;—won't, by Jupiter."

"Mrs. Alvaley, for your husband's sake, hear what I have to say," said Stewart. "I pledge you my honour you shall have no cause to regret your compliance."

"*Your* honour?" said Edith with disdain. —"That, sir, is so faded a jewel as not to be

recognisable. What you have to communicate for my husband's welfare, say to himself. He will not be the less glad to hear it because it is unexpected. In the meantime, I insist on being allowed to depart."

"Proud and insolent woman!" said Stewart, his rage overcoming his self-possession. "Do you not know, it rests with me to release your husband immediately, or keep him a prisoner for life?"

"I suspected as much," said Edith calmly. —"Why to what two monstrous knaves am I opposed!—One word more and I am gone; I *have* suffered, but I have not yet ceased to hope that God will defend the right."

The countenance of Stewart was suffused with a paleness too livid to be seen in all its fearfulness by that dim light. His tongue was parched and he did not instantly answer.

"You shall retract your infamous allusions," said he furiously, as soon as he could speak, "before you and I part."

"I made none," she replied, "and I never recall my assertions without cause."

"Come, come, Mr. Stewart," interposed Bates,—"don't put yourself in a passion; because why?—it answers no end in the world. Got all you wanted, haven't you? Old Alvaley's estates—all yours;—let the woman go —won't have her kept here any longer."

"I must beg, Mr. Bates, that you will be obliging enough to refrain from favouring me with your opinions at this particular juncture," said Stewart haughtily. "I pay people for their services, and when I require advice I generally ask for it. At present I will trouble you, as I have already said, for the loan of this apartment for a quarter of an hour."

"Shan't have it—shan't have it.—As good a man as you, let me tell you. Don't care *that* for your fly-away airs. Count gold with you to-morrow. Done every thing to oblige you, —won't be bullied. House my own;—young woman shall go away dircctly; so here goes," and suiting the action to the word, Mr. Bates, thoroughly indignant at the assumption of superiority on the part of his male visitor, pulled

1128338

the dirty worsted cord that answered the purpose of a bell-pull, with a violence that threatened the dissolution of so frangible a material.

Stewart, unwilling to incur the publicity with which his persisting longer in maintaining his present position must be attended, removed from the door, and Edith, too happy to regain her freedom to recollect, at the moment, the complete failure of her object in visiting a person of Mr. Bates's position and character, felt a sensation of cheerfulness in again breathing the dim and smoky atmosphere of the narrow street, which she had not always experienced even in her most prosperous days.

She walked along lightly and rapidly, intending to call a coach as soon as she became dubious of her course. Before, however, that contingency happened, she felt her arm gently pressed, and with extreme indignation found Andrew Stewart at her side.

"I *must* speak with you," said he. "Do not let us attract unnecessary observation. I will walk quietly with you in the course you

are taking, but I tell you candidly that I will not relinquish this opportunity of opening my heart to you, except on compulsion."

Edith looked around. No stand of coaches was in sight, and anxious as her enforced companion to avoid any fracas in the public street, she bade him "speak,—but quickly."

"Quickly be it then," said he, steadily measuring his pace by hers. "That I have loved you for years, ungrateful as you ever have been, I need not repeat to you; how I have been scorned cannot have escaped *your* memory, as it will never leave *mine*. Perhaps it was like your sex to prefer the dashing Alvaley, the heir expectant of a countless rent-roll, to the gloomy ascetic, whose progress in life was to be achieved by his own exertions. You *did* prefer him, and mark the result! However, be the past *the past*. We have changed positions *now*,—and—Edith—what charm can a prison offer to your youth and loveliness, compared to the splendour you may share with a heart that has loved you when

withered by your scorn, that loves you now beyond all earthly things, and will love you for ever!"

"And is this all you have to say?" said Edith with indescribable calmness.

"All?—yes, all—that every feeling of my heart is devoted to you and you alone," said he, with as much passionate earnestness as he could venture to express in a crowded street in the very heart of the city; "that life without you, even adorned by all that wealth can bestow or luxury covet, is worse to me than a wilderness. *You* have been the single aim and object of my life since I knew you, and now what avails the attainment of all for which I have struggled, if the incessant thought of you is knocking at my heart,—the Mordecai to the insatiable Haman?—What are legal ties when they fetter you to a bondage worse than Egyptian, to a prison home, the companion of a ruined spendthrift! Did you marry him with such expectations?—Far otherwise. In all that constitute the man,—position, prospects,

character,—you in reality united yourself to a different individual."

"Yours has at least the advantage of being a new view of the case," said Edith, with a voice so calm and patient, that Stewart, who could not obtain a glimpse of her countenance, shaded as it was by her large bonnet, began to admit hopes more decided than any he had yet ventured to indulge.

"England needs not necessarily be our residence," he resumed with greater energy than before;—"all Europe is before us;—France, Italy, Geneva,—your slightest wish will be law to me. Anywhere we shall be able to make a paradise for ourselves, the felicity of which will be perfected by love."

"I thought peace of mind and a conscience satisfied with itself, were indispensable ingredients in the composition of a Paradise," said Edith;—then suddenly bursting from her assumed calmness, she continued with an energy that alarmed Stewart, and was, it must be confessed, somewhat likely to awaken the attention of passengers: "And I have really

lived to hear this!—have listened to a proposal so base, so devilish, from the veriest wretch whose breath is permitted to pollute the common air!—If immeasurable hatred,—if unbounded contempt,—could be expressed in words of man's invention,—you should hear them now;—as it is, with an assurance of scorn as inextinguishable as your purposes are diabolical,—of a hatred as worthy of *my* character, as your villainy is indicative of *yours*, —I defy you to the utmost exertion of your malice!—You can do no more injury to my husband;—his annuity is his by the laws of his country, not by your will and pleasure;—and know, that rather than breathe for one moment the tainted air of any house inhabited by you, I would prefer an eternal sojourn in the prison, to which atrocities, yet to be investigated, have betrayed us. Begone, wretch!—or I call such protection as you dare not resist."

In two seconds Edith had sprung into a coach that had drawn up to the pavement at her signal, leaving Stewart in a state in which

disappointed love,—if that name may be used to describe a passion so unworthy as his,—burning revenge, disgust with the present, and terror for the future,—combined to render his mind a prototype of those doomed to that terrible abode where " hope never comes that comes to all."

CHAPTER VI.

It is one of those remarkable coincidences with which human life abounds, that the precise period of time spent by Mrs. Alvaley at Mr. Bates's, and subsequently with Andrew Stewart on her progress homewards, was devoted by her brother to an interview with Hughes, the confidential servant of the late Mr. Alvaley, and one of the attesting witnesses of his last most extraordinary and most injurious will and testament.

A communication from the worthy Doctor King had had the effect of awakening Dormer's attention to the fact that Hughes had been, for the last few weeks, exceedingly dissatisfied with the limited generosity doled out to him by the new proprietor of Alvaley, and had been

heard, by various individuals, to utter threats, and throw out mysterious hints of certain disclosures in his power, that savoured much more of anger than discretion.

It appeared further, that Hughes, who had quitted the neighbourhood of Alvaley immediately after the interment of his old master, had been living in London in a style much beyond his ostensible means. By a course of circumstances of no unusual occurrence, he had been drawn into connexions which had led him to indulge in gambling and drinking,—two vices most decidedly opposed to the whole of his previously steady and quiet character,—and to the equally ruinous formation of a connexion of the least creditable kind with a woman, whose extravagance was hardly exceeded by the ascendancy she had managed to obtain over her inexperienced prey.

Whether his applications by letter had not been attended to by Mr. Stewart, was, of course, not known; it is certain, however, that his re-appearance at Alvaley House was extremely unexpected by the servants, who were

its sole occupants, and that his indignation was greatly disproportionate to the apparently accidental circumstance of Mr. Stewart's absence from home just at this juncture. His anger was not diminished by the fact of the servants being ignorant of his address. They knew he was in London, but that was all, for as his absence would be short, his letters were not to be forwarded, since it was more than probable he would cross them on the road, when returning.

Hughes remained in the village a few days, and it was during their progress that those inexplicable hints and inuendoes had escaped him, which had at length, by the channel of his own servants, reached the ears of Doctor King, who had, in addition, obtained intelligence of his return to London, and of the place he inhabited when there.

Immediately on receiving this letter,—welcome as it must necessarily be from the hopes it held out of restoring to the defrauded heir his lawful inheritance,—Mr. Dormer traced out his plan of action, in pursuance of which, he sallied from his chambers the following morning

at an early hour, towards the lodgings of Hughes, without having communicated his intentions to one living being.

He was ushered into a room betraying very evident marks of having been recently the scene of the orgies of the lowest dissipation. Dirty packs of cards were lying on the floor—the apartment was still reeking with the united fumes of gin and tobacco,—the fire was scarcely lighted,—and preparations for breakfast were discoverable on a table placed awry in the midst of the room, and covered with a marvellously foul breakfast-cloth.

Mr. Dormer had not given his name to the slip-shod waiting-maid, who had ushered him into the apartment. He desired her to go to Mr. Hughes immediately, and inform him a gentleman waited to see him on business of importance.

Probably Hughes felt that there was not more than *one gentleman* extant who could possibly have any concern with him, and acting on the supposition that it was his patron who had relented, and was about to produce the

necessary supplies, he presently made his appearance from his half-completed toilette,—a person as unlike the once decently dressed, healthy looking, cheerful Thomas Hughes, the factotum of the master of Alvaley Hall, as can well be conceived.

"So, sir," said he, opening the door, and seeing only the back of his visitor, "you are come at last. Well, better late than never, as the saying is. However, another time I should like to know rather more of your movements. One good turn deserves another, and I am not a man to bear casting off without showing that I have as much in my power as my betters."

Mr. Dormer turned round, and looked full at him.

"Bless me, sir!" said Hughes, starting back with an expression of dismay on his countenance so strong as to border on the ludicrous. "I am sure I had no idea—no conception—that is,—I really believed—I thought, upon my word, sir,—that nobody but Mr. Andrew Stewart could have desired to see me just now."

"Why not?" said Mr. Dormer abruptly, and looking keenly.

"I don't know, sir, exactly," returned Hughes, who was evidently extremely embarrassed;—"to be sure, why not one gentleman as well as another?—Only you know, Mr. Dormer, sir, there might be a pretty good number of things Mr. Andrew Stewart would like to ask about the Alvaley estates, and I, considering how much I was about the late old gentleman,—quite his confidential as one may say,—may be supposed to know rather more than another, any way."

"Very true," said Mr. Dormer composedly, "and probably you had reason to expect Mr. Stewart now,—nay are even expecting him still. If that be the case, you would, I dare say, rather hear what I have to tell you at some future time."

"Why no,—I cannot exactly say that, sir," said Hughes, at the same time sliding into a chair, the support of which he seemed evidently to require; "to be sure I cannot but think it likely and natural that Mr. Stewart should wish to see me, but whether he will come to-day or

to-morrow, is really more than I can take upon me to say. So I shall be happy to learn your pleasure now, sir, without putting you to the trouble of coming again."

"Very good," said Dormer drily;—"but in the meantime, have you any particular reason for relying on Mr. Stewart's entertaining such a desire of seeing you as you speak of?—Are you quite confident, that it is his intention to seek you out and to supply those wants which drove you so lately to Alvaley House?—Because, unless you have some better grounds for believing this to be the case than your own private opinion, I shall not hesitate to tell you, that I differ from you entirely, and have good reason for entertaining expectations diametrically opposite. In fact, there is a strong impression on my mind, that Mr. Stewart, so far from being likely to see you, is more anxious to avoid you than any other person now living."

"You don't say so?" said Hughes with an air half angry, half terrified. "I cannot see why that should be, any way. Mr. Stewart has no reason to keep out of my sight, that I know of."

"Unless, perhaps, that it is hardly so convenient to him to part with money, as to you to receive it."

"Inconvenient!—How should that be, and he master of all the Alvaley estates?—to say nothing of the funded property?—Mr. Edmund, you know, had nothing in the world but a hundred and fifty pounds a year for his life;—*only* for his life, for Mr. Stewart never forgave his lady's giving *him* the preference."

"But Mr. Stewart did not make the will, I presume?" said Dormer, leaning his head far across the table at which he sat opposite to Hughes, and fixing his eyes on the quailing ones of his companion, with a glance of relentless scrutiny.

Hughes became extremely pale;—a cold moisture hung about his brows, and his respiration was thick and irregular.—His mouth was parched, and his tongue refused to pronounce the words which his perception of the emergency of the case prompted.

Mr. Dormer marked the extraordinary perturbation into which the man was thrown, and

followed up his advantage most pitilessly. "I ask you," he said in a louder and sterner voice than before,—"did Andrew Stewart make the will which has been presented to the world as that of the late John Edmund Alvaley?"

"For mercy's sake, sir, don't speak so loud," said Hughes trembling in every limb, rising and opening the door to see whether there were any listeners without;—having satisfied himself that all was apparently secure, he resumed his seat and his speech at the same time. "Consider, sir, what a serious thing it is to lay such a thing to the charge of a gentleman of Mr. Stewart's character, and rank, and fortune."

"I lay nothing to his charge," said Dormer firmly;—"I do but draw a fair inference from your admissions,—from your actions. What claim have you on Mr. Stewart, that should authorize expectations of assistance from him of so extensive a nature as to be utterly incompatible with your relative positions to each other?"

"I don't think myself bound to answer such questions," said Hughes sullenly, "nor do I

know by what authority you come here to inquire into my affairs in this manner."

"My authority is conscience,—principle,—compassion," said Dormer calmly,—"I will even add a feeling of pity for yourself. It is lamentable to the most indifferent spectator to witness such a change in the manner and bearing of a man as you exhibit. I can hardly believe that I see before me the sober, respectable, contented, Thomas Hughes, whose home was at Alvaley, and whose authority in that house was hardly inferior to its master's. *Now*—" he glanced at the haggard countenance of his companion,—his disordered attire,—the evidences of dissipation visible throughout the apartment, and his pause was more eloquent than a volume.

Hughes felt it to be so, and the whole extent of his transition from content to misery was, in a moment, placed before him. The muscles of his face were agitated by strong emotion, and Mr. Dormer perceiving his advantage, pursued it.

"It cannot now occur to you for the first

time, that your incessant and large demands on the pecuniary assistance of Mr. Stewart, must, if known, have of themselves a tendency to excite suspicion that there is a tie between you of a strong and mysterious nature," said he. "But when this circumstance is connected with others that bear on the *presumed* disposition made by Mr. John Edmund Alvaley of his estates, just before his death,—when I say such a connexion occurs, you cannot doubt that suspicions fasten on you of so serious a nature as, when they are authenticated, must place you in as awful a predicament as any in which a human being can stand in this world."

"Surely, Mr. Dormer, surely, sir," said Hughes with a trembling voice and a countenance fearfully livid,—"Surely you do not mean to accuse me of—of—having had any hand in it."

"In the will you mean, I presume."

"Yes, in the will;—I was but a witness, you know;—it was natural the old gentleman should call for those readiest to come at, when he had no time to spare. Anybody may witness a

will.—I can write my name well enough for that, but schools for poor children were not so plentiful when I was a lad as they are now."

"Mr. Stewart has already paid high for so small a service," said Dormer, his composure deepening into severity, "so high, indeed, that there are people in the world,—myself amongst others,—who have a firm belief that that signature was annexed to his document under very extraordinary—very awful circumstances."

"I assure you, as I hope to be saved," said Hughes eagerly, "I saw my old master sign his own name with his own right hand."

"A most awful appeal, Mr. Hughes, and one which a man would hardly venture to make without considering the terrible consequences such a denunciation must draw on himself eternally, supposing it to be uttered only by way of authenticating a perjury," said Dormer sternly.

"Perjury!" said Hughes, dreadfully agitated. "I will take my oath that what I have said is true to the letter."

"Doubtless,—but perjury may bear on the spirit of a declaration as well as on the *letter*," said Dormer, lowering his voice to that deep tone which so often succeeds in reaching the guilty heart. "Mr. Alvaley's hand *may* have holden the pen that traced the characters of his name, but was Mr. Alvaley's head able to direct his hand?—As you shall answer it at the dread day of judgment, tell me, was not his spirit gone to Him who gave it?"

Hughes fell back in his chair speechless.

CHAPTER VII.

A VERY few days after this scene, unexceptionable bail was tendered for Edmund Alvaley,—two of the most eminent men at the bar becoming his sureties,—and, to the unutterable joy of his devoted wife, he was once more able to betake himself to that assiduous occupation which was to afford him the means of comfortable and independent existence.

But, meanwhile, circumstances very important to his destiny were in progress. Every proper form had been gone through to prepare Mr. Andrew Stewart to appear as defendant in an action, instituted to try the validity of the will of the late Edmund John Alvaley. The case had been laid before the two eminent barristers just mentioned as Alvaley's securities,—

two of the coolest and cleverest heads that adorn the law courts of England,—and they, after a most minute and patient investigation of every detail that had been brought to light relative to the transaction, had pronounced an opinion highly favourable to the claims of the disinherited nephew.

The intervening period was one of the most intense anxiety to Mrs. Alvaley. Ardently and naturally desirous of seeing her babe restored to those rights of which he had been so unexpectedly deprived, and to which his birth entitled him, there nevertheless were moments when she admitted a secret feeling that, if *her* interests alone had been at stake, she would have considered future wealth dearly purchased at the price of her present suspense. Her constant excitement of mind was the most painful condition possible for a woman who loved to indulge those high and elevating contemplations, which are so constantly disturbed by the friction of the dull realities of this world. Edmund *now* assumed the character of comforter and adviser. In their passive sufferings

her fortitude had been the support of both; in their more active trials his courage found a field for exertion. If it were possible that their already tried attachment could assume a holier character, it was surely in this season that it was gained. Edith looked up to her husband for counsel,—for strength;—the woman's softness succeeded to the firmness of the heroine, and it is questionable whether Alvaley did not love his Edith more as an object of compassion, than when he had adored her as a being worthy of the most unbounded admiration.

Andrew Stewart's emotions on learning the nature of the proceedings instituted against him, cannot be penetrated. He betook himself to instant exertion to meet the threatened danger. And first he sought for Hughes,—an important person, who now might have sold his hours for as much gold as his utmost avidity would covet. But alas! Hughes was not to be found. In vain Stewart employed the most zealous of the agents of the police; in vain he himself sought him amongst his own scattered relatives; not the slightest traces could be obtained of his re-

treat. He had discarded the woman with whom he had been living; he had ceased to associate with his profligate companions. In short, it seemed as if the earth had engulphed him suddenly,—so lately he was *here*, so lately gone.

Stewart would willingly have relinquished half the possessions he had so long coveted,—so hardly obtained,—to have been certain that Hughes had really been so engulphed. To arrive at that certainty was, however, impossible, and in a state of mind by no means enviable, he was compelled to relinquish his hitherto indefatigable search after this important person, and to direct his whole thoughts and energies to more practicable preparations for meeting the approaching crisis.

Lawyer Browne and his clerk were of course forthcoming, and the former had little less reason than his patron for bringing all his professional skill and acuteness to bear on this important suit. Neither he nor his client were insensible that, should the result of *this* trial be unfavourable, a much more serious one must

ensue, in which existence itself might possibly be at stake. With such incentives to urge him to diligence, it may be supposed that his exertions kept pace even with the urgent desires of his patron.

Doctor King was served with a subpœna by both parties,—a circumstance, however, more unusual than surprising in this case. To be sure the Doctor felt rather curious to discover what possible use Andrew Stewart imagined he could make of his evidence, but that, of course, was not a very important question to one who was prepared to depose to "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

The day of the trial arrived, and at a very early hour the court was crowded to excess. Edmund Alvaley had been well known to the higher circles of life previously to his marriage, from which the displeasure of his uncle, consequent upon that event, evinced by the immediate withholding of the greater portion of his annual allowance, had had the effect of withdrawing him. He had not however been forgotten, for the Alvaley estates were so large

as to render their being diverted from the direct line of succession, a matter that excited much attention at the time of its occurrence, and when it was publicly announced that the will so diverting them was to be disputed, curiosity as to the results was excited to a pitch commensurate with their importance.

Mr. Dormer was the leading counsel, supported by those two eminent men whose responsibility had released Alvaley from prison. He commenced his address to the jury, with a plain and unadorned statement of the facts of the case. He represented Alvaley as the adopted son and acknowledged heir of his uncle, from his earliest infancy up to the time of his marriage. He spoke of that event as having drawn on him the severe displeasure of the deceased Mr. Alvaley, exemplified in the plaintiff's being banished from the presence of his aged relative, and deprived of a very considerable portion of the formerly liberal income he had derived from his bounty. Notwithstanding this unfortunate disposition towards his nephew,—he, the counsel, would

produce witnesses of unexceptionable character and unimpeachable veracity, who were prepared to testify to the fact, that the deceased had constantly, and up to the last ten hours of his life, postively and vehemently declared, "that he would make no will whatever;—that Edmund—the plaintiff—had already suffered enough;—that he regretted his severity;—expressed the deepest remorse for the vindictive feelings—originating in certain family circumstances not necessary to be disclosed, as not bearing on the point at issue—he had displayed towards the beautiful and amiable wife of his discarded nephew;—and firmly and repeatedly rejected all the entreaties of his other nephew, the child of his sister, and the defendant in the present action, to secure at least some certain provision to *him*." If his evidence had stopped there,—if he had been able to establish only so much on the most unimpugnable testimony,—he put it to the jury, whether they would not have hesitated in giving a verdict against them, on the oath of witnesses, who, on the other side, might

depose to the fact of having *seen* the deceased affix his signature to the deed in question. If those witnesses,—he believed it would be found that there were only two of them,—were farther proved to have benefited very materially from the profuse generosity of Andrew Stewart, the defendant,—would not the jury be very suspicious in admitting evidence that went to prove things already at variance with all human experience?—A man may be supposed to soften from revenge to forgiveness on his death-bed,—but the reverse of this was not—he did not scruple to declare his firm belief, that such a transition was not within the verge of possibility. But his evidence did not stop here. The nature of it they would hear when he placed his witness before them;—the testimony *he* would give was of a nature to remove every doubt from their minds. He would not trespass on their time and attention with comments that would be superfluous;—he left his case confidently in their hands, and he ventured to express his conviction, that, as they proceeded with it they would find it as extra-

ordinary an one, as had ever before been brought before that court, astounding as were some of the histories to be found amongst its archives.

The first witness called was Dr. King, who, in the clearest and most impressive manner, described the state of mind exhibited by his deceased patient up to the last night of his life. He farther deposed, that the illness which terminated in the death of Mr. Alvaley was not of a kind likely to occasion any alienation of mind, even at the latest moment of existence. He related the substance of many conversations between him and his patient, in which the latter had repeatedly expressed his determination to make *no* will, and his firm belief that he might safely leave to the justice of his discarded nephew the interest of his cousin, Andrew Stewart, and of all those who might be supposed to have claims on him. In short, the Doctor's testimony was as favourable to the plaintiff, as circumstantial or à priori evidence could be, and the impression produced on the court by his clear, deliberate, and calm

manner, was evidently such as must have raised in the friends of the plaintiff, the most sanguine hopes of ultimate success to his cause.

Doctor King left the Court, and the name of "Thomas Hughes" was loudly called. The crowd without made way to admit a man assisted on either side by two others; his appearance in the witness-box immediately excited the compassion of all around;—a seat was given to support a frame apparently on the brink of dissolution, and his wandering eye sparkled with a brilliancy that seemed the result of acute mental feelings. Andrew Stewart, who had hitherto been seated by his counsel, left the Court as soon as this witness had answered the first few questions put to him by Mr. Dormer, —a circumstance that was observed by many, who were led to deduce from it an opinion that the evidence of the man in the witness-box would turn the scale against him. Indeed, two inveterate gamblers, who did not find sufficient excitement in the scene before them to supply their faculties with the ordinary stimu-

lus, very soon had a wager of several hundreds depending on the result.

It will not be necessary to trouble the reader with a detail of the circumstances deposed to by the penitent Thomas Hughes. The conversation recorded some pages back between him and Mr. Dormer, must have been a sufficient preparation for the fact now elicited,—that the pen had been placed in the fingers of the dead man,—that Andrew Stewart, familiar with the hand-writing of the deceased, had himself guided it in tracing his signature to the now disputed Will,—and that this terrific expedient had been resorted to, that the witnesses, if called on in a case similar to the present, might compound with their consciences by swearing to a fact *literally* true!—As Hughes proceeded with his evidence, given, from his extreme weakness and his mental sufferings, with painful slowness, the indignation of the court more than once expressed itself in murmurs with difficulty repressed in obedience to the remonstrances of the judge; and when he was removed from the witness-box, the most

intense anxiety prevailed to learn, in what manner the defendant would attempt to clear himself from the imputation of the dreadful crime Hughes's confession fastened on him.

Mr. Stewart's counsel not having received any instructions of the possibility of an evidence of this nature being produced against his client, took the natural course of attempting to weaken the impression it had produced, by dwelling on the little credit due to a man who was a sort of king's evidence,—one who confessed to having been accessory to a forgery of the deepest kind, on the temptation of a large bribe, and who, capable of affixing such an everlasting stigma on his own character, might be supposed not quite inaccessible to a large bribe in payment of a perjury. The speech was long and able, and did more for the cause of the defendant than any auditor who had heard the evidence given by Hughes, deemed possible; —it dwelt much on the danger of admitting à priori evidence, however respectable might be the party offering it, or whatever might be the respect yielded to his talents and probable pe-

netration,—a respect eminently due, he confessed, to Doctor King,—as counterbalancing explicit testimony,—such as, the counsel proceeded to say, he was about to lay before them, from a gentleman of the legal profession who had a high stake on the issue, standing as he did amongst the most respectable practitioners of his own rank in life;—whether more credit was due to him or to a creature so abject as the unfortunate and guilty—let the case terminate as it would, still and irredeemably, the *guilty*—Hughes, whose deposition in that court had already produced so extraordinary a sensation, he left it to their judgements to determine.

The name of James Browne was then called through the court,—and again, and again, it was shouted by a hundred voices, catching up the sound, but he came not. A messenger had been despatched, who shortly returned into court with intelligence whispered into the ear of the counsel for the defendant alone, who, having listened with a countenance expressive of the most unmitigated anger, contempt, and

disgust, announced that the witnesses he had expected to produce, were not to be found, and he should therefore detain the court no longer.

Mr. Dormer shortly replied;—the learned judge summed up in such a manner as might have been expected from the present aspect of the case. He expressed to the jury his own conviction that, guilty as Hughes was, his evidence—the effect of apparently the sincerest contrition—was nevertheless worthy of belief. He said, that unless such evidence—whether the effect of compunction or of a desire of escaping the punishment of crime—were received and relied on, the ends of justice in numberless cases must inevitably be defeated.—He represented to the jury the extraordinary and unparalleled circumstance of the disappearance of Mr. Browne and his clerk, at the precise moment when their evidence—of vital importance to the defendant—was required,—a disappearance which could not possibly be explained on the plea of ignorance, since Browne was the attorney employed to defend the present action. In conclusion, the

learned judge stated the law of the case, and left the jury to consider their verdict.

The jury did not find it necesary to leave their box. After a consultation that lasted a very few minutes, which were apparently occupied rather in collecting opinions than debating them,—the verdict was announced,—as the whole court had expected from the moment of Browne's disappearance being discovered,—FOR THE PLAINTIFF.

When Edmund Alvaley took possession of his inheritance, he found that he had been despoiled of all the disposable portion of it. As soon as the action against Stewart was instituted, that worthy, preparing for the worst, had sold out of the funds to the amount of many thousands, and had denuded the most thickly-wooded parts of the estate of their finest timber. Whither he betook himself on the discovery of his appalling crime, is not to this day divulged; but wherever he may be, it is tolerably certain that the adroit Mr.

Browne, and the clerk worthy of such a master, are his companions. It is possible they may, at this time, be members of that honourable fraternity in America of which Rowland Stephenson and Sheriff Parkins are such brilliant ornaments. This, however, is mere conjecture.

Dormer—the excellent brother—was abundantly repaid for all his exertions, by witnessing the exquisite happiness of his sister, when placed in that sphere she was born to adorn. The adored wife,—the tender mother,—the exemplary mistress,—the venerated friend,—the accomplished companion,—she still finds the felicity of her life in the bosom of her family, and prefers the quiet retirement of Alvaley to all the splendours of her mansion in Grosvenor Square. She recalls the period of distress with that satisfaction which results from a consciousness of having worthily endured it, and is thankful to the Providence who inflicted it, since, by passing through the fiery ordeal, the character of her beloved husband has been strengthened and elevated. Discarding all

the levities of youth, he is now fulfilling his career as the bountiful landlord of a numerous tenantry,—the judicious father of a large family,—the patron of indigent merit,—the fosterer of modest genius,—and an enlightened member of that senate on whose decisions depend the interests of the countless millions of proud Britain and her colonies. Dormer, brought under distinguished notice by his successful exertions in the important trial, is rapidly rising to eminence, and sees before him the perspective of the highest honours of his profession. Still unmarried, he has declared himself capable of a vacillation of purpose, very unusual in his decided character, inasmuch as having originally intended to acquire a fortune for his godson, he says he feels justified, as matters stand, in leaving him to the poverty of Alvaley House, and the appurtenances thereunto belonging, whilst he takes his nieces under his especial patronage. If life be spared him, a noble fortune will eventually reward his toils,—the foundation of which he declares,—for without some such

lucky circumstance, all his talent, and all his acuteness might have escaped notice,—is to be traced to that happy suggestion of his genius, which led him to suspect the validity of an unjust WILL.

THE SUTTEE.

THE SUTTEE.

In the annals of eastern history,—of *the world's* history,—there is not amongst the records of those who have ruled mankind, one name enrolled more purely, more truly glorious, than that of Ahalya Baee, who, for thirty years, exercised supreme power over that part of central India which constituted the possessions of the Holkar family.

Intimate as our relations are with that remote country—when scarcely a house of distinction but has a son or a relative running his career there,—one would suppose that the chief parts of its history would be familiar to us all,—that the names of its heroes and heroines would be at least as well known to us as those of the

Bolivars of the opposite continent; but so far is this from being the actual state of things, that it is apprehended, notwithstanding the labours of that distinguished and lamented friend of India, Sir John Malcolm, there are few, even amongst the well educated and well informed of Great Britain, to whom the name of Ahalya Baee—celebrated as it is in India from the Himalaya to Cape Comorin,—venerated by all sects,—respected by all parties—is not absolutely unknown. And yet the story of her life pourtrays a character the more interesting, because it exhibits the triumph of intellect and principle over the most adverse combination of moral and physical circumstances.

The wife and the mother of a sovereign, she succeeded to the government on the decease of her only son, whose existence—stained as it was by profligacy and shaded by imbecility—probably caused Ahalya Baee more sorrow than his death. Her daughter, married into another family, was, by the usage of the Hindus, deprived of all claims to the enjoyment of the supreme power. Without opposition, there-

fore, Ahalya Baee assumed the reins of government, and by her almost unexampled prudence and wisdom, secured not only the affection of her own subjects, but the admiration—the veneration of the whole Indian continent.

"It appears extraordinary," says Sir John Malcolm, "how she had mental and bodily powers to go through with the labours which she imposed upon herself; and which, from the age of thirty to that of sixty, when she died, were unremitted. The hours gained from the affairs of the state were all given to acts of devotion and charity; and a deep sense of religion appears to have strengthened her mind in the performance of her worldly duties. She used to say, that 'she deemed herself answerable to God for every exercise of power,' and in the full spirit of a pious and benevolent mind, was wont to exclaim, when urged by her ministers to acts of extreme severity, 'Let us mortals beware how we destroy the works of the Almighty.'

"It appears that she rose one hour before day-break to say her morning prayers and per-

form the customary ceremonies. She then heard the sacred volumes of her faith read for a fixed period, distributed alms, and gave food in person to a number of Brahmins. Her own breakfast was then brought, which was always of vegetable diet; for although the rules of her tribe did not require it, she had forsworn animal food. After breakfast, she again went to prayers, and then took a short repose; after rising from which, and dressing herself, she went, about two o'clock, to her Durbar or Court, where she usually remained till six in the evening; and when two or three hours had been devoted to religious exercises and a frugal repast, business recommenced about nine o'clock, and continued until eleven, at which hour she retired to rest. This course of life, marked by prayer, abstinence, and labour, knew little variation, except what was occasioned by religious fasts and festivals, (of which she was very observant,) and the occurrence of public emergencies. . . . . .

" The fond object of her life was to promote the prosperity of all around her; she rejoiced,

we are told, when she saw bankers, merchants, farmers, and cultivators, rise to affluence; and, so far from deeming their increased wealth a ground of exaction, she considered it a legitimate claim to increased favour and protection. . . . . She built religious edifices, temples, and dhurmsallas *, and wells, throughout the whole of the Holkar possessions in Malwa. But her munificence was not limited to her own territories; at all the principal places of Hindu pilgrimage, including as far east and west as Juggernath in Cuttack, and Dwaraca in Guzerat, and as far north as Kedarnath among the snowy mountains of Himalaya, and south as Ramiseram, near Cape Comorin, she built holy edifices, maintained establishments, and sent annual sums to be distributed in charity. . . . . She daily fed the poor; and on particular festivals gave entertainments to the lower classes. During the hot months of the year, persons were stationed on the roads to supply travellers with water, and at the com-

* Places of rest for travellers.

mencement of the cold season, she gave clothes to great numbers of her dependents, and to infirm people. Her feelings of general humanity were often carried to an extraordinary excess. The beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the river, shared in her compassion; portions of food were allotted to them, and the peasant near Mhysir used, in hot days, to see his yoke of oxen stopped during their labour to be refreshed by water brought by a servant of Ahalya Baee; while fields she had purchased, were covered with flocks of birds, that had been justly, as Ahalya Baee observed, driven by cultivators from destroying their grain, on which the latter depended for their own sustenance.

"We may smile at such universal sympathy, and perhaps censure the bigotry which bestowed on Brahmins the largest share of her charity, and wasted the treasures of a state in the erection and maintenance of edifices in distant lands; but it was well asked by an intelligent Brahmin, (to whom this remark was addressed,) 'whether Ahalya Baee, by spending

double the money on an army that she did in charity and good works, could have preserved her country for above thirty years in a state of profound peace, while she rendered her subjects happy and herself adored? No person,' he added, 'doubts the sincerity of her piety; but if she had merely possessed worldly wisdom, she could have devised no means so admirably adapted to effect the object. I was,' this person concluded, 'at one of the principal offices at Poona during the last years of her administration, and know well what feelings were excited by the mere mention of her name. Among the princes of her own nation, it would have been looked upon as sacrilege to have become her enemy, or, indeed, not to have defended her against any hostile attempts. She was considered by all in the same light. The Nizam of the Deckan and Tippoo Sultaun granted her the same respect as the Paishwah; and Mahommedans joined with Hindus in prayers for her long life and prosperity.'"

Such was the extraordinary woman whose

last years were embittered by the most cruel trial that can afflict the female heart.

It has been already said, that she succeeded to the government of her territories on the death of her only son. Her daughter, Muchta Baee, was, therefore, the sole claimant on her affection, and that affection appears to have been strong as might be expected from this circumstance. But the daughter was as unfortunate in losing her offspring as her mother, and was deprived, like her, of an only son just as he arrived at manhood. Scarcely a year had elapsed after this fatal event, when the stroke was redoubled by the death of her husband. In the depth of her anguish she saw only one gleam of consolation,—*to die.* To expire on the funeral pyre of her husband presented to her view not only an escape from the desolate life before her, but a means of rendering her memory glorious amongst her people. To illustrate her religion by voluntarily submitting to its most terrific rite, awakened the enthusiasm of the devotee, and shrouded, if it did not soothe,

the sufferings of the bereaved woman. That such a resolution should be hailed with delight, and encouraged by every possible exhortation, by the priests to whom it was announced, can excite no surprise. Even the most faithful and attached of the attendants of the widowed and childless mother, ventured not to utter one word of dissuasion. Fettered by their own most potent superstition, they dared not interpose to prevent the performance of a sacrifice which they deemed one of its most solemn acts.

But there was yet one who had courage to exert every energy of her wondrous mind to avert so fatal a calamity. Ahalya Baee heard with a horror that is reserved for the bosom of a mother who watches the approaching death of her only child, the determination to which her daughter had been wrought by despair. Without a moment's delay she hastened to her presence; but when she met with the solemn stedfast gaze of Muchta Baee,—saw the composed fixedness of her features,—the stern and resolute compression of her lips,—the heart of that brave woman, whose mental strength had

done and dared so much, quailed within her. She felt that she had to cope with a power superior to her own;—that the victim who shrank from encountering the sorrows of a lonely life, and sought refuge in death, had sanctified to herself her weakness by beholding it as a hallowed sacrifice,—that she viewed herself as a martyr to her religion, and was beyond the reach of the appeal of earthly affections.

Nevertheless Ahalya Baee, who felt that the dearest object of her love was about to be lost to her for ever, relinquished not her design. Approaching her daughter, and clasping her cold hand within her own, she gazed on her tearfully, with that look of silent sorrow, which pleads so forcibly with the human heart.

There was a long silence, but the watchful eye of her mother saw, that the countenance of her child lost its rigidity, as she shrank beneath the intensity of that appealing gaze. And Ahalya Baee ventured to hope!

"Thou wilt not leave me, last hope of my age!" she said at length;—"I know thou

wilt not!—Thou wert ever kind and duteous, and thou wilt not render utterly desolate the bosom that bore thee."

The composure of the daughter returned. "Is it my pious mother," she said half reproachfully, "who would urge her child to cast dishonour on her religion,—to repent her of the sacrifice she has vowed,—to shrink back as if the fear of death appalled her?—No, mother, no!—Leave me to my resolution;—do not attempt to cast away my glory from me."

"And yet, oh bethink thee, sole remnant of my house!—Whom is it thou art quitting?—Thy most pitiable mother!—For what dost thou desert her?—For the cold grave!—Why dost thou seek it?—Because thou hast not courage to live on in the darkness and loneliness to which thou dost not hesitate to devote her for ever."

"Not so, my mother," said Muchta Baee, firmly, "I leave thee with a whole people for thy children;—surrounded by the love and gratitude of thy nation, thou wilt find consola-

tion for the loss of one poor woman. Long hast thou reaped fruits from the tree of fame, and long may thy hand pluck them!—Thou art the parent of a multitude."

"Mock me not!" said Ahalya Baee, majestically; "my duty I have done,—my duty I *will* do, even in my despair;—my subjects I protect;—the poor I cherish; but where rests the love of a mother?—Is it not on the head of her only child?—Sovereignty is labour;—affection is its solace and its source!—Child of my husband,—sister of my unhappy son,—fruit of my womb,—leave me not!"

Muchta Baee was fearfully moved,—tears rolled down her quivering cheeks, and fell on the bosom of her mother, against which her head now leaned. "What wouldst thou of me, oh my mother!" she cried, in accents broken by her deep emotion. "Wouldst thou keep me from my husband and my child,—condemn me to the bitter life of widowhood,—to childless age,—to unhonoured death? Wouldst thou have me the scorn of every worshipper of the gods, in that I published abroad

my resolution to dedicate myself to death,—and shrunk from the fulfilment of my vow when the time for it drew nigh?"

"Heed not the words of the multitude,—look into thine own bosom!—Listen if thou hearest not a voice there which tells thee to live for the living, not die for the dead who heed it not!—Behold me," she cried, suddenly prostrating herself at her daughter's feet,—"behold me humbled to the dust before thee!—As a mother I implore thee,—as a fellow-worshipper I adjure thee, as thou reverest thy god,—leave me not alone and desolate in my age!"

Muchta Baee had arisen as soon as her mother had thrown herself into this attitude of humiliation. As the scene became more painful it seemed as if her energy to meet it increased. Her spirit strengthened itself with the reflection, that these were the accompanying trials which would the more adorn the sacrifice she was about to offer, and affectionate as she was in her general manner,

at this dreadful moment she was calm and resolved.

"My mother, afflict me no more;—I beseech thee, let us part in peace," she said tenderly, but with composure. "* Thou art old, mother, and a few years will end thy pious life. My only child and husband are gone, and when thou followest, life, I feel, will be insupportable; but the opportunity of terminating it with honour, will then have passed. Bless my purpose, oh my mother, and leave me to myself."

Ahalya Baee had not strength to prolong this terrible interview. Prayers and reasoning were equally unavailing to shake a resolution founded on such feelings as Muchta Baee's—sanctified by her superstition,—encouraged by the priests whom she held in the highest reverence. The unhappy mother, therefore, passed the interval that remained, in meditation, and the performance of those acts of devotion which occupied so large a portion of her life.

* Sir John Malcolm.

Being unable to prevent the appalling sacrifice, she resolved to witness it. Gathering strength from her despair, she fancied she might perhaps share the feelings which animated her daughter, if she saw her sustained by them in the very act of immolation. Affecting a composure which she had not, she insisted on assuming her place in the procession that was to attend the victim, and with a step tolerably firm she assumed her position near the funeral pyre.

Her countenance not only placid, but illuminated with a feverish radiance that expressed a strange triumph, Muchta Baee thrice walked round the fatal pile, throwing flowers amongst the thronging crowd, which every individual treasured as sacred relics. The eye of her mother never wandered from her, and as the scene advanced, her calmness forsook her so much, that she was compelled to lean for support on the two Brahmins who were on either side of her. At length the preparatory rites were finished;—the widow had ascended the pyre, and sat with the dead

body of her husband in her arms. The torch was applied, and a bright blaze glowed around her. With the strength of a maniac, the hapless mother endeavoured to escape from the restraining grasp of her Brahminical attendants. The triumphant shouts of the crowd,—the dissonant crashing of various loud instruments of music,—scarcely drowned her piercing screams. In her intolerable anguish she * gnawed her hands, unable to liberate them from the persons by whom she was holden. Madness seemed to have seized her, and the most bigoted of the witnesses of that scene wished, that the agony could have been spared the woman so universally revered.

By degrees her violent anguish sank into a quiet approaching to torpor. She joined in the ceremony of bathing with others in the Nerbuddah, when the bodies were entirely consumed, probably awake to the wish of not shocking the prejudices of her people. In the retirement of her palace she indulged her pro-

* Sir John Malcolm.

found grief, and for three days took little sustenance, preserving a perfect silence. The cares of her government,—the recollection of the duties she had still to perform, roused her at length; and perhaps no grief, however intense, but must yield to the necessity of constant mental exertion and incessant occupation. By degrees her sorrow assumed the gentler form of a desire to honour the memory of the lost; and, under her directions, a splendid monument was erected to the memory of the dead. Not daring to infringe the institutions of her religion by issuing a positive prohibition of the performance of the sacrifice which rendered her childless, she had yet essayed every other human means of preventing it. Her devotion—if the superstition in which she believed, deserves that name—had not made her insensible to the demands of natural affection, and she ceased not to number, amongst the severest trials of her existence, the SUTTEE of her only daughter.

THE NÂTCH.

THE NÂTCH.

It was towards the close of the short twilight that separates day from night in India;—the young moon was just rising above the eastern horizon, the red tint of her birth gradually sinking into the pure white that characterises her, as she becomes more fully visible;—the west still glowed with the pale gold and rose-colour with which the setting sun so gloriously terminates his daily career in the East;—a gentle breeze ruffled the leaves of the mango-grove that grew a little to the south of the palace of Sirdhana; the chirping of the night-insects, and the flapping of the wings of the night-birds, were the only sounds that violated the silence of the thick tope, beneath the

shadow of which, two young lovers were exchanging their vows.

They were very young,—the maiden perhaps had scarcely numbered fourteen summers,—and in her face there was a timidity that a strange eye would have attributed to the delicacy of her modesty, which blushed for the passion it had ventured to indulge. Unhappily, the profession of the girl must have rendered those blessed feelings unknown to her;—the holiness of *her* love was derived solely from its depth and its fidelity;—*it* had imparted to her mind every better thought that dwelt there; *it* had purified what education and habit had tended to corrupt; for, alas! what of profligacy could appear strange to the understanding of an unhappy nâtch girl, whose vocation is almost universally connected with depravity, and whose escape from it had been the effect solely of the accident of the Begum Sumroo's favour, in whose service she was, and whose jealous guardianship of all her women was as available for their preservation, as if it had originated in the loftiness of her own virtue?

The young man wore the uniform of an officer of the Begum's guards. His years were just enough to give an appearance of firmness and manliness to a figure somewhat more muscular than that of his countrymen generally, but not so many as to deprive his features of that expression of ingenuousness which so rarely survives an initiation into the chicanery of public life. And Codend stood high in the favour of his mistress,—so high, indeed, that in that eminence lay the source of all his fears and his forebodings. As to Tarzah, if she had dreamt how distinguishing was that favour, she also might have trembled at the rash passion which threatened to cross its course. But to her partial mind, the rapid promotion which had elevated Codend, the simple sipahi, into Codend one of the chief officers of the royal guards, seemed but the natural result of those thousand merits which she believed as apparent to other eyes as to her own. And for that timidity which now rendered her manner restless, and her speech broken, it resulted only from her conviction, that her mistress would

not fail to visit with her displeasure the attachment of two people, each of whom her favour had benefited, but between whose lots that partiality had made so wide, so impassable, a distinction.

The Begum Sumroo, admired as she was by all the people, was more dreaded than beloved. In person this extraordinary female did not reach the middle size; her features, however, were beautiful, and their expression gave her an air of command and distinction which might seem almost incompatible with her diminutive figure. Her eyes were splendid, even in that land where the darkest and most brilliant orbs lighten at least half the faces that meet the view. Their character, however, was not pleasing;—their loftiness partook of fierceness; their penetration was shaded with a sinister acuteness. Her voice was commanding and not without melody, which aided very much the effect of her conversation, distinguished in itself for great talent, and an accuracy of observation too often perverted to bad ends. Her courage was of the highest order, far beyond

that which characterises the generality of the stronger sex in India. Her husband had fallen in a conflict with the Mahrattas, and the Eastern heroine had gallantly placed herself at the head of his troops, and led them on to battle with an enemy far superior in numbers. Venerated by her subjects, therefore, on both these accounts,—her intellect and her prowess, —she carried her despotism to the very verge of human sufferance, and perpetrated atrocities which fortunately in this age can stain the annals of no monarch but an oriental or a Russian.

The secret interviews of the lovers were not of frequent occurrence, but their public meetings, constrained as they were, were not without interest. That vigilance must be indeed incessant which they could not elude even to the indulgence of an occasional glance!—The very song which she was engaged in singing, afforded Tarzah an expressive vehicle for the declaration of *her* feelings. When she poured forth her declarations of passion, how intelligible the momentary glance of her eye rendered

it to her lover, that her heart was then making itself known to his!—And when she solicited the return of that extreme passion, did not Codend understand that *he* was that lover, and did not the lightning flash of his kindling eye tell her that her feelings were understood and reciprocated?—Yes;—even in the very presence of the begum,—even by means of those very amusements celebrated for her pastime,—there was an intercommunication of love between Tarzah and her too distinguished lover.

"I would that this night were well over!" said Tarzah, as she gazed upwards at the moon, bright and still brighter, throwing its lovely beams on her garments glittering with gold and silver.—"It is hateful to me at all times, Codend, to be where thou art and yet so far apart from thee!—How I envy the meanest man that is within hearing of thy voice, or to whom thy words are addressed!—Oh, that this night were past!"

"But wherefore?" said Codend.—"This is not a darker night than a hundred others through which we have passed without bitterness. The

stars are becoming more and more numerous, and for thine own particular star, Tarzah ———"

"Ay!—mine *own* star—it is there, thou seest,—yonder—on the very verge of the horizon,—the only spot in the vast heaven shadowed by a cloud;—what a dark mass threatens to engulph it, long before its setting, thou wilt observe, near as it is to its going down!—Shield me, Codend!—how is it that I fancy the face of the begum is looking down on us even through the darkness of that thick and threatening cloud?"

"Thou art becoming infected with the follies of the Zenanah," said Codend; but he spoke soothingly, for the cheek of the girl was so pale as to attest the reality of her fears. "Hath not the kindness of the begum been of late redoubled on thee?—What is there that should trouble thy repose? On what side dost thou expect the evil that menaces thy destiny?"

"Even from our love!" interrupted Tarzah, her voice subsiding, and becoming even more tremulous.—"I know not why, but that very

kindness of which thou hast spoken, seems to me more fearful than reproof. When I stand in the begum's presence, her glance is ever on me, and those searching eyes seem to wrest from me the secret I would preserve at the hazard of my life. At such moments, methinks to escape from that pursuing glance I would flee even from thee, Codend!—And then when she speaks to me,—her words are all favour, in truth, but her voice,—oh, Codend!—that voice seems to wither every hope that fain would flourish within me!"

"This is altogether weakness!" said Codend with tender chiding. "Conscious that thou harbourest in thy bosom feelings and thoughts which thou wouldst conceal, is it not according to the course of human nature that thou shouldst shrink from every eye that would look on thee? Trust me, it is a penalty we all pay for mystery,—I amongst others."

"Then thou too hast had thy misgivings!" said Tarzah gazing earnestly in her lover's face. "But to *thee* there is nothing dark in the

begum's kindness. On *thee* her eye shines as a sun of favour.—I never saw it averted—never, never threatening."

"Safer perhaps either than——But come, Tarzah, let us not waste the hour in gloom. Such moments as these are too rarely within our grasp to be thrown away."

"Alas," said the girl, "I confess to thee, Codend, that my heart cannot cast away the black garment that shrouds it. These glittering trappings look to me more melancholy than the midnight, and beneath them thou may'st feel my heart beating as if nothing less than death could quiet it."

Ere the lover could reply, he caught the well known signal of their parting. He whispered one word of hope and encouragement in the ear of his mistress, and swiftly and silently disappeared in the depths of the thicket.

* * * * * *

A hundred lights were in the hall, and the begum sat surrounded by her court. The nâtch had commenced, and the steps of the

dancers glided in almost imperceptible motion, affecting the senses in the same manner as the overpowering perfumes that impregnated the atmosphere. Tarzah was there,—the leader of the performance, covered with a thousand charms which fastened the eyes of the gazers with their dazzling preeminence. Codend occupied his usual station, but never had his gaze been more fearlessly fixed on his mistress than now,—never before had his passion so entirely overmastered his consciousness of the presence in which he was standing. How could *he* be cautious who, in the wild impulse of that intoxicating moment, might even have denied its necessity? His soul was filled with Tarzah, and he followed every motion of her graceful form with burning eyes and shortened breath, as if none were there to witness, or as if he desired the testimony of the assembled world. There was no mistaking the sentiments which thus shone in every feature. The youngest in that presence might have read them; how then could *she* fail to interpret

them, whose full glance rested alternately on him and his mistress, with the scrutiny of jealousy and premeditated revenge?

Hard indeed was the task of the unfortunate girl. She moved under the painful consciousness that the eye of the begum was on her with an almost constant, a bright, but cold gaze, such perhaps as the boa casts on its unheeding victim ere it enwreaths him in his fatal folds. Once she had glanced on the too impassioned countenance of her lover, and even that momentary look had, she felt, been followed by her mistress. She felt as if an invisible chain were around her, fettering her motions and dragging her onwards to something so darkly terrible that it became more appalling from its shapelessness. Her voice trembled as she proceeded with the song; her limbs no longer obeyed the guidance of her will; and the least observant of that assemblage thought the favourite dancer had never yet sunk so far below the level of her own powers.

Some deemed her ill, and thought if the begum were merciful, she would sign for the

conclusion of an entertainment to which the strength of the principal performer was so visibly inadequate. And when the powerful voice of the mistress of the festival, in its loudest tones called "*enough!*"—they judged it but the effect of the manifest indisposition of her favourite.

Her hand was extended towards Tarzah, and her eye, its very colour deepening with the intensity of her emotions, was fixed on her. "Hither thou!"—she said in the same deep and almost unearthly voice, and the whole group knew that the fiercest passions of that unwomanly heart were in dreadful conflict.

Trembling—shrinking,—but not daring to disobey,—pallid with the chill of extreme terror, Tarzah advanced. She stood there with folded arms and downcast eye, quailing beneath the intolerable gaze of her mistress, feeling her entire desolation in the utter silence that now brooded over that hall, so lately filled with all the voluptuous harmony of song, but looking withal so lovely in her helplessness, so softly feminine, as confronted with the female

despot whose tyranny menaced her, that the most warlike heart of the assemblage was touched with pity, and awaited in pain the issue of the scene.

The begum allowed her victim to writhe in the painful suspense of that entire silence, during a dreadful interval, and her countenance gloomed with yet intenser wrath. "And *thou* knowest to sing of love and betrayal, minion!" she cried, her lip curling with ineffable scorn. "And thou hast dared, even in our very presence, to exchange lascivious glances with thy paramour,—nay to carry thy lewdness into the recesses of the zenanah itself!—Out on thee, foul harlot! has thy shamelessness emboldened thee to meet the eye of thy mistress, and conscious of thy crime, yet to live!"

"Mercy, gracious mother!" said the girl, according to the custom of her country, applying that holy word to her ruthless superior. "In truth there *was* no sin; Codend knoweth——"

"Silence!" said the deep voice of the begum, and her threatening eyes lowered yet more

gloomily as that name awakened fresh throbs of jealousy; "we bandy not words with thee. Ourselves have witnessed thy abominations, and are here not for parley, but for *doom!*" and, as she uttered that boding word, two of her guards seized the hapless girl, still sustaining her almost fainting form on that spot.

The begum waved her hand, and two other of her attendants advancing, proceeded to raise the centre stone of the pavement of the hall. The work was performed in awful silence, and the eye of the victim followed their operations with the fascinated glance of a terror that verged on madness. Hardly daring to admit the gathering consciousness of the horrors that were preparing for her, she endeavoured to excite herself to a belief that anything so darkly cruel could not be dealt by woman to woman. Alas! the despotic sovereign whose authority had been set at nought,—the vain female whose claims had been undervalued,—had no pity for her who had been the partner of the first crime, and the cause of both!—As a queen, the begum was eager to revenge the

insult to her power,—as a woman, her whole soul burned to destroy the beauty which had tempted a favoured one to despise her own.

"Set thyself in order, for thy chamber is ready!" said the begum, and her manner was more terrific in the calmness of her triumph, than it had been in the vehemence of her rage.

Without delay for one breathing moment in the upper air, the victim was laid in that damp and dark tenement, and then arose a shriek so wild, so prolonged, from its depth, that the hearers trembled as the heart of one man.

"Mercy for *her!*—mercy—mercy!" shouted the voice of Codend, as he rushed forwards and prostrated himself at the feet of the begum.—"On me be thy vengeance!—*mine*, yonder tomb! I have deserved it,—I tempted,—I seduced,—I betrayed. Punishment for my crime!"

"Peace, slave!" said the begum in the imperturbable inflexibility of her purpose.—"I will, that she die, and that thou live!* that is my decree!"

* *Mara hookum hi*—the sovereign's fiat.

"It cannot be!—it must not be!—it *shall* not be!" said the desperate lover. "Are ye men, and will ye suffer this?" he cried, addressing the assembly. "Shall this tyranny never have an end? Shall this bloodthirstiness never be satiated? Shall this woman continue to gorge herself with victims, until death devour her?—How long will ye have patience—how long?"

"Away with the traitor!" said the begum, and in a moment he was hurried from her presence.

But then the irrepressible feelings of the surrounding crowd broke forth. They prostrated themselves before the woman-despot, and one voice of supplication rose from the suppliants. In vain—in vain!—Her heart hardened itself the more for the pleadings that were arrayed against its purpose, and in the presence of the court — amidst the shrieks—the maddened cries of the victim,—the stone was replaced,—the tomb closed upon its living tenant.

The courtiers withdrew, but not so termi-

nated their design of rescuing the poor girl whom so short a time had withdrawn from the splendour of light and youth, and plunged into the dismal sepulchre. The durbar, where the nâtch had been celebrated, opened into the gardens, and access to it of course was easy, no wall secluding it, pillars united by arches forming its boundary. At midnight, therefore, when the begum had retired to her inner apartment, they resolved to open the vault and rescue its wretched inmate, if indeed her terrors had not completed the cruel work of the murderess more rapidly than she herself had calculated. Relieved from that dreadful sentiment which oppresses the human heart on witnessing cruelty it cannot prevent, the fear-stricken courtiers breathed more freely, and separated in the certainty that, ere the morning dawned, the tomb would have been defrauded of its victim.

But little knew they of the tenacity with which their mistress pursued her purpose to its end. Suspecting the compassionate design her people meditated, she slumbered that night on

a couch placed over the vault in which the wretched Tarzah was numbering the moments of her departing life. Yes, she *slumbered* there, and when the ear-piercing shrieks,—the frantic supplications—of the maddening girl roused her from her rest,—"thou wastest thy prayers on the ear of the wind!—thou knockest against the breast of the rock!" she cried, and as if satisfied with the progress the work of her vengeance was making, she slumbered again!

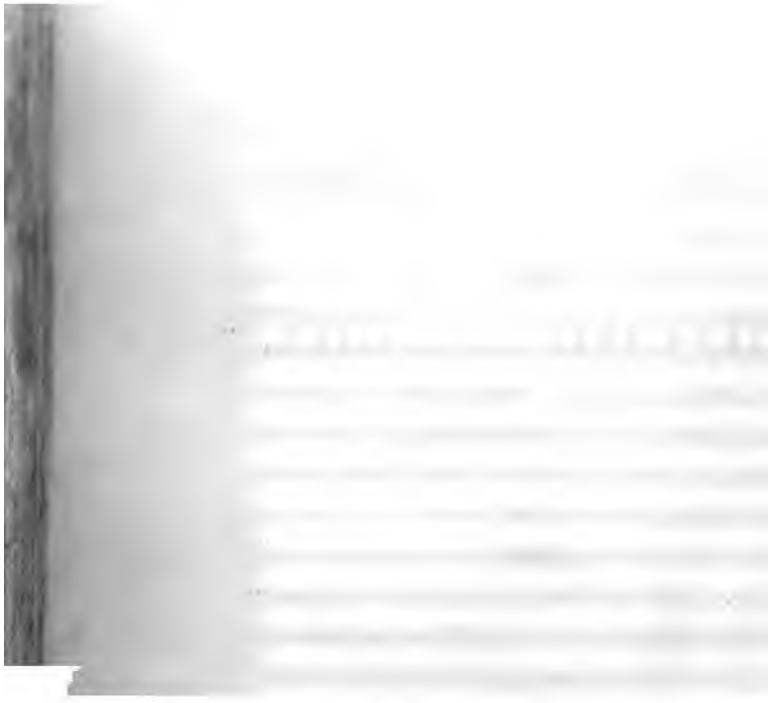
And night after night the woman-fiend slept there, until the shrieks subdued into moans, and these became fainter and less frequent,—and at length, the silence of death evinced that the sufferings of the victim had had an end.

Codend had escaped, and thrice the life of the begum was attempted that year, by steel, by poison, and by the bite of the venomous reptile, and thrice had the powers of evil, whom she served, protected her. Thrice also had one or other of the courtiers seen Codend for an instant, and as often had he disappeared.

All the efforts of the begum for his capture were fruitless, and were at length relinquished in despair. But to this day it is believed, that he hovers ever near the scene of the murder of his beloved, with vengeance in his heart, and the weapon of vengeance in his hand; and the soothsayers of Sirdhana declare, that, although he must long wait for the appointed hour, "he will drain the cordial to the dregs at last."

THE

HALF-CASTE DAUGHTER.



THE

HALF-CASTE DAUGHTER.

FORTY-eight hours after the arrival of the tappal*, which brought him an European letter of most imposing dimensions, Lieutenant-colonel Berners, commanding a regiment of native infantry, the number of which it is not necessary to particularize, quitted the cantonment of Secunderabad †, and was travelling on the road to Madras with all the expedition to which money and promises could bribe a set of *dâk* bearers ‡.

The object of his journey was such as must have rendered even the velocity of a steam-carriage slow compared with his desires. He

* Post.

† The cantonment of the Company's troops at Hyderabad.

‡ A relay of bearers posted at every stage, or march, as it is called in India, for those who travel by *dâk* or post.

tablishment. To Madras, therefore, she had been destined, and the letter which informed him of her arrival, was full of those joyous self-gratulations on being indeed in the same land with her father, which in the daughter were so natural, — to the parent so mingled with pain and bitterness.

But in the first embrace of his child, how could he remember aught but love and peace? She clung to him with all the unrestrained affection of girlhood, radiant in the beauty of seventeen,—glowing with the warm tints and flashing eyes of her oriental descent,—moving with the finished grace of her European education. In *pride* the father gazed on her, and forgot, for one brief moment, that *he* had inflicted on her the shame beneath which she was yet to bow,—that she was to shrink under the influence of *his* crime.

At present Miss Berners was a guest in the house of her father's agent, a worthy and wealthy man, but not sufficiently influential to render it advisable that his young guest should make her *dêbut* on the theatre of eastern society under his protection. Lieutenant-

colonel Berners, at Madras, was only one of the fifty-two Lieutenant-colonels of Infantry who stand in the way of the promotion of their juniors. He had but one relation in the world amongst the really influential people of that worshipful community, and she was the haughty wife of a distinguished official at the head of one of the departments. He calculated, however, with great confidence, on her affording the patronage his girl would need, and trusted that, being introduced under such auspices, she would eventually form a desirable connexion. But Colonel Berners, with his "up-country"* notions, had evidently reckoned without his host. He forgot that he himself was nobody amongst the élite of the Presidency, — that his country-made coatee and epaulettes were so many badges of insignificance, drawing a strong line of demarcation between himself and the high and mighty aristocracy at whose boards, by virtue of his relationship to the lady before mentioned, he was permitted to occupy occasionally a vacant

* A name applied to Stations remote from the Presidency.

seat, promoted, perhaps, to the honour, by the accident of a late refusal.

However, Colonel Berners, relying on "the force of blood," very courageously effected his entrée to the house of Mrs. Alton, on one of those days on which she had graciously condescended to withdraw the fiat of exclusion usually issued to her servants against "red-coats, and people in palanquins." This piece of good fortune was accompanied by another, highly favourable to the Colonel's designs,—the lady was alone.

After the usual greetings,—the more cordial, perhaps, for being thoroughly insincere,—Colonel Berners mentioned the arrival of his daughter, and his anxious desire to procure for her the advantage of his fair cousin's acquaintance.

"Ah! your daughter, is it?" said Mrs. Alton, with praiseworthy good humour. "I saw the name of Berners amongst the list of arrivals, but I had not the least idea that the proprietor was in any way connected with you, far less so closely. Indeed, to say the truth, Colonel,—

pray forgive my *bêtise*,—I am ashamed to confess, that my memory is so bad I had really forgotten you were married."

Colonel Berners looked,—what practised pen shall venture to describe *how* he looked? To Mrs. Alton, however, the expression of his face was quite intelligible, and her own gloomed instantly. "I am afraid I have trespassed on forbidden ground," she said, with a polished coldness that would have done honour to a patroness of Almack's. "You will do me the justice to allow, Colonel, that after your request, it was utterly impossible I could have the remotest idea of the real state of the case."

"She is not the less my child," said the Colonel, deprecatingly, and it was all he could say at that moment.

Mrs. Alton opened her greenish eyes,—grey originally, but changed with a thick suffusion of bile, into their present verdant hue,—in an astonishment that for some seconds threatened to express itself in speechlessness.—Then was a long pause.

"Your child!" said the lady at length.

"Very true, my dear Colonel;—there is nothing to be said against the fact, but then there *are* circumstances which, as you are well aware, it is impossible to overlook. There is really nothing in the world I would not do to oblige you, but in my position, you see, I could not effect an introduction of this kind on society without establishing a precedent. Even as it is, one is compelled to meet daily the strangest people!—And, in fact, I make it a point never to give any other person the privilege of forcing an undesirable acquaintance on me, by being exceedingly scrupulous *whom* I myself bring into notice."

Poor Colonel Berners had not, in the whole course of his previous life, felt so thoroughly humiliated! His child,—the pride of his heart,—thus contumeliously rejected by a person who owed her present position to *him*,—who had commenced her Indian career under his auspices,—and who, supposing the human heart to be not entirely *ossified*, would, it might reasonably be presumed, have rejoiced in the opportunity of repaying some part of the debt

of gratitude!—There was a second pause, and during its continuance Mrs. Alton's reflections had veered in another direction, whether impelled by the expression of the Colonel's countenance or some more occult motive, it is impossible to determine.

"I am, my dear Colonel," she began, "so *very* anxious to serve you in any way I can, that waiving all my objections, I *will* call on Miss Berners, and see how we like each other. I can at least have the pleasure of receiving her at one of my small parties,"—the lady meant *second-rate parties*, and Colonel Berners was not slow in translating her less offensive expression into its very humiliating signification. However, for the sake of her on whose head his sin was now visited, he repressed his indignant feelings, and accepted the concession thus ungraciously obtained.

Mrs. Alton's promised visit was made so soon after this interview, that Colonel Berners was as near forgiving her original offence as a man could be, who felt obliged to remind himself that it was, nevertheless, unpardonable.

Very few worldly people are guilty of doing a good-natured action, at the risk of some inconvenience to themselves, without a particular motive. Mrs. Alton was actuated by *her* invisible demon in the present instance. At Madras, as elsewhere, the spirit of female rivalry runs high, in all its various shades of beauty—wit—place—and parties. Mrs. Alton's superior tact had gradually put all her antagonists *hors du combat* with one exception, and that exception was made in the person of precisely the most obnoxious individual that Mrs. Alton had ever inundated with her smiles and her compliments. She was one of those eternal Mrs. Brownes, who, as Mrs. Alton said, meet one at every turn of human life, in every known spot of the habitable globe. She was a *comfortable* woman,—full of mirth, and laughter, and jokes more distinguished for their humour than their brilliancy,—in short, the moral antithesis of the cold and courtly Mrs. Alton. Mrs. Browne had *just* precedence of Mrs. Alton,—the privilege of her husband's few days' seniority in the service,—

and with all her good temper she had evinced a proper sense of her own position in one or two very decided instances. It followed, of course, that Mrs. Alton hated her as devoutly as ever dear friend hated dear friend. Nothing could exceed the amiable cordiality that distinguished the intercourse of the two ladies. Their greetings were of the most affectionate character,—exceeded in warmth only by the virulent abuse each lavished on the other in her own particular coterie. Mrs. Browne had just imported a daughter,—rich in all the accomplishments of the boarding-school,—a singing, dancing, laughing, romping Kitty Browne, always surrounded by a host of men, and threatening to marry most mortifyingly well. Now Mrs. Alton would have given the world to produce an eligible rival,—such a one as should throw Kitty Browne completely into shade. But her sisters were all married, and her daughters yet under the care of the Ahma*,—and all her aspirations after the coveted good threatened to prove ineffectual.

* Nurse; the word literally signifying Mother.

Not that the guardianship of a young lady is generally very desirable to a woman who is herself young and well-looking enough to expect and receive a full tribute of admiration; nor could Mrs. Alton have coveted such an office, if it had not been for this odious Kitty Browne. She was so bored with the everlasting changes rung on Kitty Browne's playing,—and Kitty Browne's dancing,—and Kitty Browne's follies of all kinds,—and so distanced in the gaiety and splendour of her parties, by the superior attraction Kitty Browne bestowed on her mother's,—that she had the greatest possible desire of setting up an idol of her own. The idea of Colonel Berners's daughter was, therefore, at the first blush very agreeable, and the reaction caused by her knowledge of the irremediable stain attached to her, was proportionably violent. A few minutes, however, had sufficed to calm down her mood into that equanimity which is absolutely necessary to all those who have any object to attain. It would be as well, at all events, to see what kind of an animal the girl was,—what Eu-

ropean education had done for her,—and whether her features and complexion were so unredeemably Asiatic, as to put the fact of her origin beyond all doubt. She did half admit the possibility of passing her on the world as a *niece* of Colonel Berners's, but this idea was checked in its birth, by the instantaneous conviction that the Colonel himself would never sanction a deception of the kind. She had nothing left for it, therefore, but to see the girl herself, and to decide whether she could be brought forwards as a promising rival to Kitty Browne. The more she meditated on the plan, the less appalling appeared the circumstance which had at first so startled her from her propriety. Nay,—with the natural propensity of the human mind to believe that easy which it desires, and that correct which it decides on effecting,—she almost brought herself to believe, she should be able, in this particular instance, to procure the removal of the bar which excluded unmarried half-caste females from the entrée to Government House.

With such projects floating in her brain, Mrs. Alton arrived at the house where Anne Berners was staying, disposed to allow the girl credit for the full amount of any attractions she might possess, nay, rather inclined to exaggerate them than otherwise. But even *she*,—with all this predisposition in Anne's favour,—was surprised into more real admiration than she recollected to have felt in the course of her previous life.

An eye large, brilliant, and black,—a complexion glowing with the warm tints of Italian beauties, a clear rich brunette deepening on the cheek into carnation,—a small mouth and lips of the most rosy ripeness,—scarcely closing over teeth of pearly white,—a nose partaking of the aquiline and Grecian characters, but belonging strictly to neither,—hair black, silky, and profuse,—a countenance beaming with happy youth and the hopes of a yet unclouded existence, —a form of perfect symmetry, and a stature tall enough to redeem it from that dwarfish insignificance so generally inherited by her race from their mothers, a distinctive peculiarity of

their base and degraded caste;—altogether, Mrs. Alton was too much delighted with the *coup d'œil* even to venture on an expression of admiration.

Anne's manners were worthy of her beauty, which is saying much for them. Unconscious of the ordeal through which she was passing, she conversed well and easily. Mrs. Alton was enraptured, and before she shook hands with her *protegée* elect at parting, it was arranged that in two days Miss Berners should become the guest of her father's kinswoman,—an affinity now most amiably insisted on, and extended to his daughter,—for as long, Mrs. Alton said, as might suit the convenience and inclination of both parties. "In fact," she added to Colonel Berners, as he put her in her carriage, "for as long as I can keep her, which I have some suspicion will be far too short a period for my wishes."

The Colonel was delighted, and the more when he reflected how strong had been the prejudice which the charms, the graces, of his beautiful, his gifted child, had so triumphantly

overcome.—Moreover, he felt relieved from much of the secret remorse with which he had been compelled to regard his own guilt as the cause of the exclusion of his daughter from the pale of her equals. He began to indulge in visions of her splendid establishment, and could not sufficiently impress on her his conviction that, in the house of his cousin, Mrs. Alton, she would find herself happily and delightfully situated beyond all she had hitherto experienced or imagined.

In that land of promise, Anne Berners soon found herself a denizen,—nay more, a star.

If admiration and flattery could confer happiness, she would have been completely blest. But what human being ever escapes the voice of the slave who warns him daily,—"*thou art mortal!*" A thousand slights,—an infinite succession of those butterfly-kicks which wear the spirit to death,—brought constantly before her the misfortune of her birth. Enchained by the strong links of prejudice, even the intelligent and the good looked down on the girl as one of a race born of shame,—whose inheritance

was the vices of both parents, the virtues of neither. Willing to admit the abstract truth, that the human mind is formed by education and habit, they denied the application of it to particulars. They acted as if the accident of her birth had given a sinister bent to her heart and intellect, from which the whole subsequent circumstances of her life could not redeem her. Knowing the general inferiority of her class, they forgot that it might be traced to the successive causes of protracted companionship with the mother,—defective education,—subsequent rejection by society generally, very few Englishwomen choosing to receive a half-caste who has not covered the infamy of her descent by marriage. Was it wonderful, therefore, that marriage itself should finally be entered into chiefly as a means of escaping from this exclusion, and of acquiring in fact a social existence?—or that a connexion founded on such motives should terminate almost always in the degradation of the husband to the level of the wife, of whom he is soon ashamed, whilst, not choosing to blush openly, he affects a vul-

gar disregard of all opinion, which becomes at length the recklessness he had originally only simulated?—Such evils are attributed by Europeans of pure extraction to the mere fact of the mixed blood, as if its tint were the sign of the curse of Cain, entailing at once his crime and its punishment on his posterity for ever.

Mrs. Alton's triumph over Mrs. Browne and "her Kitty Browne," as she called her, was, however, quite as complete as she had calculated,—sufficiently decisive, indeed, to ensure her satisfaction with her protegée, and to render her heartily desirous of seeing Anne at the head of a comfortable establishment of her own. Mrs. Alton was too well aware of the tone of feeling pervading the whole atmosphere of Madras society, to be annoyed at the occasional expressions of pity in behalf of Anne, to which she was obliged to listen. Having resolved that Miss Berners, as her guest, should be received every where, her exertions were incessant until her object was accomplished. Anne was not only admitted at Government House, but honoured with such particular

notice as made it evident to many aspirants, that an alliance with her, so far from being an impediment in the career of their ambition, might greatly assist its success. Lovers were numerous, and proposal succeeded to proposal with such rapidity, that, as Mrs. Alton said, if her dearest Anne's head were not bewildered in deciding amidst such infinite diversity, *hers* was in conjecturing on what lucky youth that decision would ultimately rest. Colonel Berners had of necessity returned to his regiment. Previously to his departure from the Presidency, he had ventured to whisper to Mrs. Alton a regret that Anne, admired and courted as she was, had not yet effected an establishment. But Mrs. Alton reassured him, by her prognostications, that his daughter's marrying well was a certainty not one whit the less incontrovertible by being in the future tense instead of the past. Supported by such an authority, the Colonel was, as he was bound to be, content; and he awaited with cheerful patience, the letter which was to convey to him

intelligence of the consummation he so devoutly wished.

With all Mrs. Alton's ambition for Anne, it had hitherto taken a general flight, nothing so uniquely desirable meeting her eye, as to distance all competitors. But at length a star appeared above the Madras horizon, to which *she* could not fail of paying her devotions, and the rather because she saw, with a watchful eye, the incense which the everlasting Mrs. Browne was offering at its shrine. A certain Sir Henry Tresham landed, adorned with all the blushing honours of the Chief Justiceship of the Presidency. He was an extremely agreeable and gentleman-like looking person *for* a Chief Justice, an advantage which might have been supposed to supersede the necessity of every other. Being a five-hundredth cousin of Mrs. Browne's, she was of course privileged to be particularly intimate with him, nor could it be deemed an unlawful spirit of monopoly in her to consider him the especial property of her Kitty. Mrs. Alton saw the game with all the

superior accuracy of a looker-on, and observing the deficiency of skill in the players, boldly cut in for a hand, and very soon had the lead.

Was Anne Berners a passive instrument in the hands of her protectress—resigning heart, feelings, hopes, to her management, as if she possessed none? Anne had passed through a severe noviciate since she landed in the Indian world. She had heard the constant "Who is she?" and its terrible answer—"a half-caste!" with such intense consciousness of humiliation, as can hardly be understood by those whose happier lot has exempted them from its experience. Quite aware of the extent of her own mental and personal claims to consideration, she was doubly sensible of that pressure which continually bowed down her spirit. There was but one avenue of escape,—to become the wife of a person so influential, that the lustre of his dignity should dazzle the minds of the world—*her* world—into forgetfulness of all that his wife would wish forgotten. Having once clearly established this fact to her mind, every passion was disciplined into its proper place of

subordination. Of her numerous suitors, she allowed herself to regard none with preference. If she detected her memory in dwelling on any amiable trait or attractive quality exhibited by a young man who had no other distinction, she ever afterwards treated that individual with marked coldness. She had left England artless, with all her talent,—naïve, with all her polish;—six months in India, which implied six months' consciousness of the inexpiable infamy of her birth, had rendered her artificial and politic. Every day brought its lesson—an impressive one—that distinguished rank in her husband was the only shield between her and the contumely of the worthless world she despised, even whilst she could not brook its contempt. Mrs. Alton's counsels became the more oracular, in her estimation, from being identified with the results of her own experience, and she seconded her patroness's views on Sir Henry Tresham, with a skill the more effective from the display of modest indifference by which it was veiled.

"So at last the campaign is ended, my dear,

and we remain in full possession of the field," said Mrs. Alton, to her protegée, the morning after Sir Henry Tresham's proposals had been formally made and accepted.

"Precisely," replied Anne, and her voice was so cold, that Mrs. Alton looked at her in amazement.

"You are practising your new character, my dear child, I perceive. But take care you 'do not o'erstep the modesty of nature.' You are too grave even for the wife of a Chief Justice."

"Am I?" said Anne with a smile that had in it more of scorn than gaiety.—"I was thinking by what a direct line of causation my father's fault has led to my advancement."

"The world does not reason so deeply. They will be content to take the very evident cause of your own attractions as a most sufficient why and wherefore."

"I, at least, cannot forget. I feel that within me which, more loudly than a thousand voices, tells me I was born with feelings to participate in such household charities,—such home-attachments,—as a *purchased* wife can

never share or bestow. What a destiny for a heart that has not been seared by one passion!—to which life is all untried;—*love*, yes, *love*, Mrs. Alton, but as the garden of Irêm, looking at, longed for, never attained unto! Well—well—I, at least, have not wrought my own destiny, and I mean—do not look alarmed—to fill it with dignity. I might have been a happier woman, but that is a rôle quite out of the sphere of an intellectual *half-caste;*—it will be my own fault if I be not a respectable one. I am not entering into this alliance blindly;—I know what I sacrifice, and what I gain. Sir Henry is ——"

"A very worthy man, child, and, which is more to the purpose, *éperdument amoureux!*"

"It is my earnest hope that he will never have cause to repent his attachment. Of *my* fidelity,—nay of conduct even above suspicion,—he may be assured, for it will be the study of my existence to bequeath my children that, the want of which has been the misfortune of my life,—an honourable name.—My poor father!—What remorse he must have

felt, when I landed on these shores! Knowing the habits of India so well as he did, how could he venture to bring me here, educated as I was?"

"Necessity,—necessity, *mon enfant*,—which word contains the solution of half the enigmas of existence. But come,—be a little more à l'allegro. Sir Henry dines here this evening, and sadness or regret will be but a poor compliment to his disinterestedness. Do, my dear, suffer your eyes to sparkle, and your lips to smile. Only remember, how completely we have triumphed over that everlasting Kitty Browne and her horrible mother!"

Anne did remember, and she allowed her mind to dwell with complacency on an infinite succession of triumphs actual and prospective. And in that moment began the metamorphosis, which a few months perfected, of the ingenuous, vivacious, glowing Anne Berners, into the polished, correct, and heartless Lady Tresham.

KNIGHTHOOD.

KNIGHTHOOD.

CHAPTER I.

It was the middle of a night in August,—a very bright night, looked down upon by a moon so unclouded that only stars of the first magnitude were visible, and those shone with a pale and ineffectual splendour. The borough of Coleminster stands, as may be seen in the map of England, nearly in the centre of the kingdom, and on that said ancient and loyal borough the moon, to which we have before alluded, beamed with most auspicious brightness. Now that the particular night on which our story opens was distinguished from all other nights in the year, must have been apparent to any person acquainted with the cus-

toms of country towns, who had had sufficient curiosity to relinquish his usual slumber for the sake of perambulating the streets of Coleminster at this especial epoch. Groups were scattered in the market-place, evidently engaged in some most interesting discussion, and the High Street was thronged with persons either stationary or moving in one direction,—namely, towards the high-road, of which this street formed the avenue. If any individual had been unoccupied enough to examine the countenances of his companions, he would have seen there every evidence of highly-wrought expectation, varying through all the gradations of pleasure;—the pleasure of good-nature, evincing itself in a broad smile,—of sarcasm, in anticipation of food whereon to satisfy its appetite;—of mockery, that thought no ill, but loved frolic exceedingly. There were a few boys amongst the crowd, but they had assembled chiefly in obedience to the gregarious instinct of their kind, and made no more than sufficient noise. Altogether it was rather a respectable assemblage, the hour considered, and

that decorum prevailed which is not always the characteristic of a mob in a manufacturing-town.

The chimes sounded the half-hour after midnight, and the bells of the half dozen churches which reared their spires or towers above the roofs of the houses of Coleminster, immediately began to give forth all their strength of tone. It was a very merry peal, the more enlivening to the population from its contrast to the usual stillness of that hour. And presently the rushing forwards of chariot-wheels was heard distinctly, nearer and more near, and the mass of people darted forwards to meet the cavalcade, the arrival of which they had anticipated.

Our business lieth not in describing the order in which a certain number of equipages of diverse kind entered the good town of Coleminster. We will look rather upon a scene which will enlighten us fully on the occasion of this unusual assemblage.

A large brick house rears itself in perpendicular pride above the irregular, ancient, and unaristocratic buildings of a long narrow street

that runs due north and south through Coleminster. A capacious and not ill-proportioned drawing-room was lighted up to-night with extraordinary splendour. A table stood in the centre, covered with a sumptuous collation, flaming with candelabras, wax-lights, and cut-glass. A good fire added its quota to the illumination, albeit it was August, and within the influence of its warmth stood half-a-dozen persons, betweeen whose ages there was not the difference of a greater number of years, four being females, and all engaged in that confidential discussion which marked them to belong to one family.

"There cannot be a doubt of it; I have not the least fear on the occasion," said the eldest lady of the group, a pretty little dark-haired woman, with very much vivacity of manner, almost enough to class her amongst the bustling bodies of this world. "How unfortunate that mamma should be in London just now!"

"We shall contrive to manage very well, I dare say," returned a plain tall personage, not much younger than the first speaker, and who,

we may as well state, was the wife of the little lady's elder brother. "We have the advantage, you know, of one matron of the party."

The little lady sneered, and tossed back her dark curls. "From mamma's indifferent health it has frequently occurred, during the last few years, that the honours of this house have been done by a Miss Bramble," she said with dignity. "I have no fear on *that* score; I only regret mamma cannot have the earliest enjoyment of her new honours."

"I do not think mamma will care much about them," said a tall fair girl of eighteen,—but so timidly that she was evidently aware the remark would not be altogether acceptable to her companion.

"Emma is always *so* provoking!" said Miss Margaret Bramble, three years the senior of the offender,—a priority of birth always asserted in her claims to *family* consideration, but very modestly withdrawn from public notice. "I wonder, Lucy, you do not persuade papa to put an end to her intimacy with that strange Miss Orme,—a very improper companion at

all times for Miss Emma Bramble, and doubly so henceforwards for the daughter of Sir Joseph Bramble!"

"Hush!" said Mr. Bramble; "not so loud; remember we are not yet quite certain."

"Pshaw," exclaimed the younger brother,—Doctor Tom, as he was called by the family, having lately graduated as an M.D.; "I wish I were as sure of Sir Henry Halford's practice, as my father of coming home *Sir* Joseph."

"I wish it may prove so," sighed Mrs. Bramble dubiously, her hopes on the occasion being influenced by two very contrary feelings,—that of pride in the prospect of increased consequence to herself by the elevation of her husband's family, and of an amiable desire of depressing the vanity of her sisters-in-law,—a desire by no means unusual, under the present constitution of society, in persons placed in circumstances of similar relationship. Besides Mrs. Bramble, to do her justice, had little personal interest in the matter, inasmuch as *her* ascent in the scale of society would only be from 'Mrs. Joseph Bramble' into 'Mrs.

Bramble.' *She* had no prospect of being greeted as 'my lady,' for, as somebody has said, "the infamy of knighthood does not descend to a man's posterity." "Ah! nimium felix, si sua bona nôrint."

"Taking the bright side of the question, we shall at least be entitled to look down on the Perrys of the Park. Their airs since they got outside of the town have really been intolerable. Their affectation in considering themselves county people on the strength of it!—However, they will feel their proper place now with regard to *us*, I trust," said the little Miss Bramble with a peculiarly dignified elevation of her nostril.

"I wish papa would have done with that horrid manufactory!" said Miss Margaret. "The Perrys are always insisting so disagreeably on the precedence of lawyers and professional people generally!—*Trade* has such a plebeian sound. If once papa would lay it aside, people would soon forget that he had ever been anything but a gentleman."

"At least we have the name of Sir Robert Peel on our side,—in itself a host;" said Doctor Tom, with an air of authority.

"I have been persuading Joseph to retire from the firm these months past," said the wife of that gentleman. "With our fortune I have no idea of our voluntarily submitting to the degradation of being excluded from all the member's first parties; especially *now*, when our pretensions to the first society of the county will be undeniably valid."

"I like trade," said Joseph drily; "I have always been used to it."

"Really, I do think Joseph and Emma must be changelings," said Miss Margaret appealingly. "They are so different from the rest of us!—I wonder where they learnt their grovelling notions!"

"Mamma says, no sensible person in any country, more especially in a commercial one, ought to be ashamed of trade, and that one industrious tradesman is worth more to the community than any given number of idle

gentlemen," returned Emma, with somewhat less timidity than before.

"My mother is a sensible woman," remarked Joseph. "I wish"—he paused—

"All her daughters were like her, I suppose," said Miss Margaret, supplying the hiatus. "I rather think Emma's notions savour more of Miss Orme, than of Mamma, whose *own* family, be it remembered, were all gentlemen."

"Consequently she is a very competent person to decide on their value," said Joseph.

At that instant the bells pealed forth their note of triumph, and most auspiciously terminated a discussion which threatened to rise above the temperate point. The thoughts of the party veered instantly to the immediate cause of their being assembled.

"Now doubt is at an end, and I think we may venture to congratulate each other," said Doctor Tom, as the sound of carriage-wheels rattled along the pavement.

And doubt *was* at an end; and loud and long was the revel of that night, for a whole host of the body corporate were assembled round the

table of their chief, to quaff bumpers of congratulation on his accession of honours, and to sun themselves in the glorious anticipation,—more vivid as the Burgundy flowed more freely,—of a perspective of similar dignities to fall on their own most uncourtly persons.

Great and important were the changes produced by this event in the family of the new knight. A tradesman by education, by the habits of a whole life, and by that preference which habit is sure to induce, he hesitated very much on *retiring*,—a point so eagerly insisted on by his two elder daughters and his younger son. Doctor Tom was very earnest in supporting the entreaties and representations of his sisters with the best possible logic. He talked much on "the desirableness of cutting all connexion with people in the lower grades of society,—a consummation hardly attainable whilst sir Joseph was compelled, by the relations of commerce, to remain in correspondence with them. Having made one considerable step in the scale of *ascent*, it was but prudent to maintain their footing with firmness, and to

hrow aside every weight having a tendency to lepress their progress. The Miss Brambles—the laughters of Sir Joseph Bramble—might look forward to marrying,—*what* limits, indeed, might be placed to their reasonable ambition? It would be *very* hard if the head of their house —their father—should refuse to lend such aid to their progress as might be expected from him,—as indeed, all things considered, he—Doctor Tom—must say it was a parent's duty to afford." To these and similar arguments Sir Joseph had neither resolution nor ability to oppose any of an opposite tendency, and long before Lady Bramble was apprised of it, the decisive step had been taken which separated her husband from that class of society in which he had long lived respectably, and for which alone he was qualified.

Lady Bramble was a very sensible, but at the same time, a very timid woman. Constitutionally nervous, she had long since resigned any authority she might originally have possessed over her two elder and high-spirited daughters. Indeed, in their estimation, she

was principally valuable in her character of *chaperone*, her views being too unaspiring to fledge the wings of their lofty ambition. Sir Joseph's intention of emerging from the chrysalis-degradation of tradesman to the butterfly-brilliancy of gentleman, had been formally notified to her, and her advice and opinion as formally requested. They were given honestly and frankly, even whilst she knew how unavailing *her* sentiments or wishes would be to divert the current of affairs resolved on by so large a majority of her family.

"My reasons for advising against your giving up the factory, are too numerous to be expressed here," she wrote. "Some of them, however, may be stated. First and principally, I doubt whether your real income, even with the addition of the £500 per annum for which you will let the factory, &c., &c., will be sufficient to meet the expenses unavoidable in that more ambitious style of living which you meditate. It is, at least, quite certain nothing can be saved from it as a fund for settling your daughters, or of adding to their portions if unmarried at your

death. It is no slight evil, in my judgment, that they will be accustomed to a lavish expenditure during your life, for the enjoyment of which they must pay by severe privations during the greater part of their own. I anticipate the manner in which Lucy and Margaret will meet this assertion;—they will argue much on the probability of their marrying advantageously. To this I have only to reply, that in considering questions of such magnitude, no sober calculator will be influenced by anything short of moral certainty,—and how very far from such a condition is a matrimonial chance! Indeed, reflecting on sundry facts of which we are all aware, it is not unfair to conjecture, that their own predilections may be in the way of the fulfilment of their day-dreams. They cannot understand the struggle they may one day experience between love and ambition; nor, though I am no advocate for romantic attachments and unsuitable unions, am I particularly desirous that my daughters should contemplate this connexion only as a means of rising in the world,—a state of feeling I have

hitherto believed quite incongruous with youth, and the *un*selfishness that ought to be its characteristic.

" With regard to your own comfort, I think the step one of the most unadvised you could possibly take. Society and newspapers cannot occupy every hour of existence, and I fear leisure will be found dreadfully heavy to a man accustomed, during his entire life, to employment,—sometimes laborious. Moreover, at the end of every day you *used* to look back with enjoyment on the usefulness of the occupations you had pursued. You had the satisfaction, of which few are insensible, of having afforded work, and consequently sustenance, to many families. You were pleased with knowing yourself to be a good master, and with being called so. You liked to be looked up to, even by operatives. Moreover, your consequence in the commercial world was soothing to your self-love, and justifiably so, being as much a tribute to your integrity as to your good fortune. And for what are you going to exchange all these felicities?—For

the *name* of gentleman—not one atom beyond. They who believe themselves born to occupy that sphere in society which you affect, will repel you from their circle as an intruder, or at best admit you for the sake of your dinners, and as a butt for their satire. Have Lucy and Margaret forgotten, that the knighthood on the dignity of which they so emphatically insist, is precisely that miserable accident of office which serves no other end than that of rendering its possessor a more obvious aim for ridicule? Recollect it is not the guerdon for services done;—it is not an honour to reward the faithful servant of his country;—it is a fee paid—as a vail to a domestic—instead of money,—at which the royal donor sneers as he bestows it. Thank God, Joseph is safe from the inheritance;—*his* good sense will dictate the wisest course for him to pursue, if his good nature does not lead him to submit to the less wise dictation of others."

Sir Joseph read and re-read, and sighed, and doubted, but he finally let his factory. His

elder son's good nature did, as his mother anticipated, triumph over his good sense, and he gave up business. Moreover, he purchased a sort of cottage orné,—just such an one as people always build in the vicinity of manufacturing towns,—about four miles from Coleminster; and because he tired of "strenuous idleness," he took a farm of two hundred acres, adjacent. He liked riding over his fields very well, and he rejoiced in seeing the growth of a fine crop, and he was pleased with the mirth of the hay-making season; but knowing nothing of the practical part of farming, he was obliged to trust very much to a kind of bailiff—one Job Stevens,—to whom he gave large wages, that he might have the less temptation to peculate. Mrs. Bramble was very well pleased with the arrangement, particularly as it added an exceedingly pretty phaeton to her enjoyments, in which she generally exhibited herself two or three times a week to the envious gaze of the town's people. Moreover, she drove a pair, and as the Perrys had never harnessed

more than one, she felt herself looking down on them with all the amiable condescension of justifiable superiority.

Lady Bramble never returned home. She died in less than three months after the *ennobling* of her family, not of a broken heart, but of a worn out frame and a wearied spirit. The two beings who regretted her long and deeply, were her daughter Emma and Miss Orme.

CHAPTER II.

As short a period of mourning as could decently be allowed on the death of a mother, having been spent in most reluctant seclusion, the family of the Brambles addressed themselves to the task of exhibiting to the world those splendours which they thought illustrative of their elevated position in society. The coup d'essai on the part of Miss Bramble, Miss Margaret, and Doctor Tom was—"to cut Miss Orme dead."

Poor Miss Orme!—The first Sunday the Brambles exhibited at church in second mourning, just as the organ was pealing forth its preparatory notes, she laid her accustomed hand on the door of their family pew, in which she had sat as long as she had been a denizen in Coleminster. Alas!—Doctor Tom placed

his opposing hand in most discourteous juxtaposition, firmly holding the door, and gently—no, presumptuously—informed her, that every sitting in that pew would be, to-day and henceforwards, engaged.

Miss Orme smiled and went to the next, where meeting with better treatment, she attended to the service with her usual composure; indeed, Miss Bramble declared her effrontery, which she herself doubtless called presence of mind, was quite unaccountable.

Poor Miss Orme!—She possessed all that the Brambles—the majority of them at least—most despised—talent, poverty, and content. Her father was dead; he had held some office under government, the income of which had not more than sufficed to support that style of living which he thought necessary to his respectability—perhaps because it gratified his own peculiar tastes. The very small surplus which, from some feeling of duty, he had continued annually to lay by as a fund for the provision of his only child, had not accumulated to a thousand pounds when he died, and

the interest of this, with something more than a hundred a year, which had been bequeathed to the widow by a relation, formed the whole ostensible income of herself and her daughter. But then, if Miss Orme had not fortune, she had had at least the benefit of an education more solid and more masculine than is usual to her sex. Proud of her early manifestation of talent, Mr. Orme had been judicious enough, and prudent enough, to aid it with all the cultivation that could be procured. Very thankful was Miss Orme for this, in her estimation, the most valuable legacy he could have left her;—it gave effect to that higher endowment which education cannot bestow—*the power of creating*. By the exertion of this power, Miss Orme had the means of adding considerably to her mother's comforts, and the two lived in a small cottage just on the outskirts of Coleminster, furnished with a certain degree of elegance, and admitting but few visitors;—*very* few, for they were the wise and the good, who constitute a fearful minority in the aggregate of society. Miss Orme, however, was happy; happy in the

consciousness of usefulness,—of talents well directed and time laudably employed. She laboured assiduously in her vocation, and she reaped the fruits of it not only in the success of her efforts, but in the refuge it afforded her from those misfortunes from which even she, in the privacy of her life and the constancy of her occupation, had not escaped.

And the cloud which had darkened her blameless youth, had sprung from one of those attachments the origin and progress of which defy all human calculation. What in the world Miss Orme could see in the man she had chosen, was a question often asked by her real friends, but never satisfactorily answered. He was made up of negatives—being neither stupid, nor vulgar, nor ugly, nor clever, nor refined, nor handsome. He was like any other of the thousand and one whom the universities annually send forth to fulfil their undistinguished career amidst the obscurities of life; and that *he* would have looked up to Miss Orme, was quite as incomprehensible as that she should have looked down upon him. Walter Scott

has attempted to account for an attachment of this nature, by supposing it a wise provision which impels the weak to seek the strong,—the unendowed to aim at supplying their deficiency by associating themselves with the greatly gifted. The *canaille* of Coleminster, however, did not trouble themselves with theories; their tea-table coteries found quite sufficient food for gossip in the fact of the engagement. Some thought *he* might have done better, and many declared, with great satisfaction, that she could not have done worse. The lovers were often seen together, and there was nothing equivocal in their manner. If their engagement were alluded to, they smiled and answered not, according to the wont of the betrothed; and so two or three years passed on, and they waited, it was supposed, for some better provision than either at present possessed. But at the end of that period, the thing was evidently at an end. The gentleman's evenings were spent at home, and the lady's walks were lonely. She became very thin and very pale, and the world pronounced her consumptive; some hinted at de-

sertion and a broken heart; and some of the most spiteful affected great compassion for poor Miss Orme, and thought women generally were much happier if they were not wiser than other people. On the whole, people generally were very well pleased that the affair had terminated in a way that must necessarily be the least agreeable possible to Miss Orme.

In process of time,—after such a courtship as made protracting spinsters sigh over the matrimonial misery its brevity promised,—Mr. Ellis—that was his name—married one of the notables,—just such a woman as *à priori* any judicious person would have pronounced exactly suited to him. Her talents, far from putting his to the blush, would leave him in the enjoyment of a very triumphant superiority, and her portion afforded an adequate addition to his income. So a house on the most approved scale of Coleminster gentility was taken and furnished, quite distinct from his office,—he was in the law; and the wedding was celebrated with the due proportion of bride-cake, new dresses, wedding-visits, and so

forth, greatly to the edification of the unmarried generally, and much to their benefit, as by exciting the imitative faculties with which human nature is so abundantly blessed, the year had not expired ere two other couples were added to the happy class of brides and bridegrooms.

After Mr. Ellis's marriage, Miss Orme's health and appearance were wonderfully restored. The curious who scrutinised her with eyes intent on detecting that woe-begone expression which ought to characterise damsels wearing the willow, affected to be scandalized at the sustained cheerfulness of her appearance and demeanour. The indignation of the Brambles generally, was vehement, and exhibited in the most decided patronage of Mrs. Ellis. They began even to take pleasure in Miss Orme's occasional visits to their sister, inasmuch as they then enjoyed the delectation of enlarging on the amiability and gracefulness of Mrs. Ellis,—on the devotedness of Mr. Ellis to his bride,—on the elegance of their house,—the sumptuousness of their furniture,—and the liveliness of their parties. Miss Orme listened

to these everlasting tirades with praiseworthy calmness, exhibiting no emotion, except on one or two occasions when she was guilty of the *bêtise* of a laugh that would not be restrained. Doctor Tom was particularly vociferous in his expressions of admiration, and, which is more surprising, his sentiments were sincere, if his manner was exaggerated. Mrs. Ellis was precisely the kind of woman whom he could understand, and who was inclined to think him a prodigious genius, because he wrote now and then a letter about nothing, in the hebdomadal journal, an achievement which sanctioned his assuming the character of a literary man, and his being classed, by universal consent, amongst the literati of the luminous society inhabiting the ancient and loyal borough of Coleminster. Indeed, a most comfortable flirtation was speedily established between them, encouraged much by the Miss Brambles, who exulted greatly in Doctor Tom's conformity to fashionable usages, and who would not have been greatly shocked by his exhibition of fashionable morals.

Mrs. Ellis was an occupant of the pew of the Bramble family on that memorable Sunday from which poor Miss Orme was to date her exclusion from it. Now Mrs. Ellis hated Miss Orme with all that warmth and sincerity with which small minds are apt to regard the objects of their liege lord's first love. She suspected that there were occasionally, on the part of her respectable husband, certain lingering recollections of the obnoxious individual, which were apt to intrude during the course of a long winter's evening tête-à-tête; when *he* sat with his legs on the hearth, his head thrown back on his chair, and his vision filled with *pictures in the fire*,—and *she* was engaged in some unmentionable piece of housewifery which absorbed all the intellect she had. She could not work and talk;—if she spoke, her needle was still,—if that moved with its ordinary despatch, she was dumb. And *he* could not always read after the bore of a day at the office,—and *monologue* talking was not greatly to his taste,—so he was compelled to *think*. Who ever thought of the past and

did not sigh?—And Mr. Ellis sighed,—and Mrs. Ellis heard him,—and then she too had her thoughts,—and she became jealous, and very properly and reasonably was very angry with Miss Orme, because she thus ventured to intrude herself on the memory of her quondam swain.

On this Sunday, therefore, Mrs. Ellis was in a state of beatitude, that would have been perfect if Miss Orme would but have been more discomfited, as any person of common feeling doubtlessly ought to have been. Doctor Tom was rewarded with a smile more beaming than any that had hitherto gladdened his heart, and he felt, meditating on the deed he had done, that even in this world virtue hath its reward.

Poor Emma could scarcely believe it possible, that any person in decent society would so wantonly have violated common courtesy as her brother had done. If she had had the least suspicion that so glaring an insult was meditated, she would have saved her friend's feelings by conveying an intimation of it, or she would have appealed to her father, who was absent

from church accidentally, and whose good-nature would have urged him to prevent it. It was precisely because they knew she would have pursued one of these alternatives, that Doctor Tom and his two senior sisters had been careful to preserve the most absolute silence on the subject; and though they were annoyed and irritated, they had no sentiment of compassion, when Emma, overcome by the proceeding, burst into so violent a fit of crying as compelled her to leave the church.

Whilst she, as soon as breakfast was over the next morning, left home for the purpose of visiting her friend—of apologizing, if she *could* apologize—and, as the event proved, of being herself consoled by the amusement Miss Orme derived from the subject,—Doctor Tom and his sisters sat down to hold a serious consultation on the nature of an entertainment to be given by them in the name of their father, Sir Joseph, early the next week, and to prepare a list of *eligibles*, for which purpose Doctor Tom was provided with pencil and paper to prick down names as they occurred.

"Let us lay it down as a rule to be departed from only on the most justifiable reasons, that no family is to be invited who is likely to walk here," began Doctor Tom. "Indeed, I would willingly exclude all who have not a carriage of their own, but that would so miserably reduce our party. And the Ellises *must* be asked,—*she* is such an ornament to a room."

"In *your* eyes, Tom," said Miss Margaret, very emphatically. "I think Mrs. Ellis a good-looking and pleasant enough woman, but you rather over-rate her. Of course she must *come*, but I do not agree with you that our rooms would look a bit the worse for her absence."

"The old story," said Doctor Tom, resolute in preserving his own temper on this point and the good humour of his sisters, if it were within the compass of possibility. "Men and women never did, and to the end of time, never *will*, agree on the subject of female beauty. However, then—I put down the Ellises at the head of the list by way of beginning. Now the Perrys ——"

"Mrs. Bramble hates them so much!" said Miss Bramble, appealingly.

"But then somehow or other they have got such a standing, that our omitting them will be nothing less than a dead cut, and perhaps the ill-natured may place their absence to the score of their refusing our invite. Then you know they called after ——" he paused, not choosing to finish a sentence which would have brought so palpably under their notice the recent death of their mother.

Both sisters were silent for a little. Margaret was the first to recover herself:—

"I do not understand why Mrs. Bramble's tastes are to be referred to," said she. "*We* give the party; let her confine her selections and exclusions to the cottage; I am sure I shall not interfere, and I hope she will be as obliging now."

At that moment Mrs. Bramble's carriage drew up at the door, and the trio had scarcely time to exclaim "how provoking!" before she and her husband were in the room.

"Joseph and I have driven over to know if

we can assist you in your arrangements for this splendid affair," said Mrs. Bramble, animated to extraordinary vivacity by the prospect of those said splendours, and of the preparatory bustle, in which she delighted.

"We are very much obliged to you," said Miss Bramble with a display of satisfaction too abundant to be sincere. "You have arrived quite *àpropos*, for we were discussing the propriety of inviting the Perrys, and we know you dislike them so much!"

"Oh not I, poor things!—They have been so very civil of late, that I could not do less than return their civilities, and in fact Miss Perry has been staying at the cottage these four or five days. We have just taken her home this morning."

The Miss Brambles looked at each other, more irritated than they could venture to show, that their sister-in-law had preceded them in an intimacy which they fully intended to make. Doctor Tom covered their silence by saying carelessly, "Then the point is settled, and the Perrys are to come."

"Now then," said Mrs. Bramble, drawing her chair close to the fire, and putting her feet on the fender, "let me hear whom you mean to invite."

"We are but just beginning to think about it," said Miss Bramble. "You see Tom has only two names on his list. Think over the carriage-people. The more of them the better."

"There is not *one* on the corporation," said Mrs. Bramble despondingly.

"The corporation!—My dear Mrs. Bramble, we are not going to call a common hall!" said Miss Margaret with indignation, for in her secret heart she nourished a holy horror of the civic dignitaries.

"Nevertheless, considering my father's situation, we must absolutely ask some of the aldermen," said Doctor Tom decisively.

"We can pick from the whole lot, and there are two or three not so perfectly horrid as they might be," said Miss Bramble soothingly.

"I can be of no use to you, I am sure. The line of exclusiveness is not suited to me; so whilst you settle the matter I shall have a chat with my father," said Mr. Bramble.

"You will find him in the study," said Miss Bramble, dwelling on the last word; the room to which she alluded having accompanied the family in their ascent to dignity, and been elevated from *the little parlour*, to the more genteel appellation of *the study*.

Sir Joseph was found by his eldest son in his slippers and dressing-gown, leaning back in his easy chair, his eyes fixed on the fire, and his newspaper on the table by his side. One hand lay on the newspaper; the other was thrust within his waistcoat, and he looked altogether as unhappy as the most inveterate idler in the world.

"How are you, father?" began Mr. Bramble, shaking hands with Sir Joseph, who greeted him with a sincerity that evinced how he rejoiced to be delivered from himself.

"And how does your farm answer?" inquired Sir Joseph.

"Why as yet there has been hardly time to know," replied the son. "Job Stevens seems a very honest fellow, and he says he will make

the ground produce as much as its nature will allow."

"I thought," interrupted sir Joseph, "the land was pronounced the best in the county. You pay for it as such, if I remember."

"Ay!—there is the fruit of a man's beginning a business of which he knows nothing!" sighed Mr. Bramble. "I was certainly taken in there, for Stevens declares the land is not worth the rent by ten shillings an acre."

"And you have a seven years' lease?"

"Yes; however I must make the best of it. I do not suppose I shall lose *much*."

"Ah, Joseph! A year since we should have thought it poor consolation, not to *lose* much. We were pretty sure *then* to be getting much."

"I am afraid giving up the business will prove but a bad speculation," replied Joseph, lowering his voice as if fearful of being overheard by any other member of the family. "I wish we may not live to repent it."

"Live to repent it!" said Sir Joseph, warming into sincerity. "Why I repent it at this

moment, and have done every hour since I suffered myself to be persuaded into taking so foolish a step. Your poor mother advised me against it;—if I had listened to her!—But Lucy and Margaret wearied me to death about it, and Tom seconded them, and *you* yielded to your wife's wishes, and when every body was against me, what could I do, and my wife from home?"

"Unfortunately, it cannot now be helped."

"Not unless I take the factory into my own hands again, which would make me ridiculous in the eyes of the whole town. I fear we have enemies enough as it is, for the girls, except poor little Emma, seem to have their heads turned ever since I became *Sir* Joseph, and they have *cut*, as they call it, half the friends I had. Between you and me, son Joseph, though I cannot but confess I had some sort of pride in the thing myself, I fear my mayoralty this year was the most unfortunate accident that could have befallen me. I have never been myself since. Nothing to do from morning to night—no Saturday's payments to remind me

that the week is at an end; the markets rise and fall, and I get nothing by them. In short, I was bred a tradesman—I have lived a tradesman—and to be a gentleman in my old age is hard upon me. Doing nothing is the most fatiguing work I ever experienced."

Poor Sir Joseph was, indeed, becoming a very miserable man. He had been as lively, bustling, and good humoured a person as any on the body corporate, until this unfortunate distinction fell on him, just to elevate him into a mark for the multitude. He did not like the kind of society his daughters were ambitious of assembling around him, for he had neither feelings nor habits in common with those who composed it. He liked a snug party, composed of people who talked of the state of the manufacturing world, with the variation of the affairs of the borough, both of which topics Doctor Tom warned him were caviare to the tastes of his more distinguished acquaintances. Sir Joseph knew nothing of sciences or arts; if he ventured a word on either subject, he was certain to commit some error which deepened the

complexion of his daughters, and contracted the brows of his son. Of what are called the public places of the kingdom, London was the only one he had visited, and his migration thither was annual, — a journey literally on business connected with his vocation, the arrangement of which required a week. The amusements and the institutions that render the metropolis the delight of the gay and the learned, had no attraction for him; and consequently, when they were under discussion, he was necessarily silent. Then he liked large suppers of substantial hot viands, and eschewed ices and sandwiches as utter abominations. But all other evils appeared light in comparison to the inroad now threatened on his domestic comfort. He had been worried into a reluctant consent to the magnificent entertainment which, his children had decided, it was incumbent on him to give. But as the preparations advanced, his troubles increased on him. First, this room was submitted to a metamorphosis,— then another, until at length the whole family party were compelled to take refuge in his

sanctum—a place hitherto inviolably dedicated to his use—a retirement in which he enjoyed the pleasure of calculating the amount of his profits, and anticipating the fortune he meant to accumulate. Those days were over; and if ever Sir Joseph felt the full bitterness of his ascent in life, it was when the dining-table was spread in his little parlour, his large chair turned out for the better accommodation of the intruders, his papers thrust into the drawers of his bureau, and the bureau itself removed into a niche at the farthest possible distance from the fire.

It required all his habitual good temper, and all Emma's whispered assurances that the bustle would be over in a week, and he would have the room to himself again, to prevent his interposing, even in this advanced stage of the proceedings, a veto on the brilliant debût his children intended to make in the character of "*The principal family of Coleminster.*"

CHAPTER III.

THE eventful evening arrived, and the Miss Brambles looked as elegant as white satin, blond lace, and pearls could make them; their satisfaction with themselves being greatly enhanced by the observation, that the Perrys, in their blue silks with gold and turquoise ornaments, were not to be compared to them.

But the most delightful event of the evening consisted in the introduction of a certain Sir Charles March, who accompanied a young collegian then visiting in Coleminster, between whom and the Brambles had hitherto existed a civil sort of dislike, which did not interrupt their acquaintance, but greatly increased the surprise and pleasure with which they received his distinguished friend.

Sir Charles attached himself to the fair Margaret with great perseverance during the whole evening.—a distinction which Miss Bramble would hardly have pardoned, if she herself had not nearly engrossed the attentions of Jonathan Lumley, Esq., M.P. for the borough, the attainment of whom was, and had been for nearly a year, the grand but unacknowledged object of her ambition. How it happened that Mr. Lumley permitted himself to be entangled in the meshes of her coquetry is inexplicable, for if he had ever been roused to feeling so strong a sentiment as positive dislike, it was Miss Bramble who had had the power of so animating him. Perhaps it originated in his being a degree more than half asleep, which was his usual state of vegetation, and he was pleased to indulge his drowsiness beneath the shelter of the lady's inordinate vivacity and incessant volubility. He was gifted with great talents as a listener, which was precisely the endowment in which it was necessary that Miss Bramble's associates should excel. Having been allowed to talk with no other interruption than

an occasional monosyllable, she was impressed with the conviction that Mr. Lumley had been remarkably pleasant, whilst *he* retired early in the morning, with an aching head and a wearied spirit, which he failed not to attribute to the intolerable clatter, as he called it, to which he had been foolish enough to subject himself.

Like all other pleasures that have been eagerly anticipated, the substantial enjoyment this evening promised, had not been grasped; and if disappointment were not experienced, its absence was occasioned solely by the unusual good fortune of other objects of desire having been exhibited during its progress.

On the morning succeeding this expensive attempt at a debût in the arena of provincial fashion, Miss Bramble and her sister Margaret breakfasted alone, Doctor Tom being yet in bed, and Emma, who had retired early from a scene of gaiety she had not enjoyed, walking in the country, having taken her early meal some hours since. As to poor Sir Joseph, he had not yet risen. He had sought his pillow

late, and even *then* he had found it impossible to sleep, his mind being inclined to busy itself with calculations, how much champagne and burgundy had been consumed, and how many such fêtes he could afford to give, before he exhibited himself to the world in the character of an insolvent debtor.

But the tête-à-tête of the sisters was not engrossed by the discussion of objects of such vulgar interest. They were employed in congratulating themselves on the prize which seemed almost in the grasp of each,—a husband who possessed that good both so eagerly coveted, a well ascertained position in the world. What could be more respectable than an alliance with an M.P., whose wealth and influence in the borough rendered his election as certain in each successive Parliament, as if a seat in St. Stephen's had been his inalienable birth-right? And was not title—such as Sir Charles March had to bestow—well worth all the trouble Margaret meditated taking in order to secure it? To be sure she had not ascertained precisely what that title was,—whether

a baronet, or whether a knight of some military order,—for she would not permit herself for a moment to suppose, he owed his honours to so undignified a source as—she mentally allowed with a sigh—her father had done. Mr. Hughes, who had introduced him, was by much too proud to appear publicly as the associate of a person whose claims to consideration were at all disputable, and Margaret, in her inmost heart, indulged in dreams of precedency which she did not think fit to confide even to the bosom of her sister.

If the reader will take the trouble to refer to the letter in which Lady Bramble dissuaded her husband from resigning his factory, there will be found a hint, that "the predilections of her daughters might be a stumbling-block to their ambition." This hint referred to an attachment of long standing, on the part of Miss Bramble, to a certain curate, whose weekly eloquence had quite subdued *her* heart, at a time of life when women are generally supposed to be addicted to romance and moonlight. Her family had most strenuously dis-

couraged and disapproved this penchant, but Miss Bramble was inflamed to a very decided attachment by this opposition,—an attachment that had been nourished by clandestine interviews and correspondence. It would probably have expired beneath the gentle breath of encouragement, but strong opposition had fanned it into a brisk flame, nor had a doubt visited the mind of the lady that it would eventually terminate in an elopement, until the marriage of one of the Perrys to a pluralist rector, had make her shrink from sustaining the inferior rôle of a curate's wife, and the unexpected acquisition of dignity by her father had opened such views to her ambition, that love rapidly disappeared amidst the crowd of lofty aspirations that suddenly rushed upon her mind.

Her interviews with the unfortunate Mr. Crosby had gradually become more and more infrequent, and his tender remonstrances proportionably importunate,—so importunate, indeed, that Miss Bramble began to deem her constant lover a most impertinent bore. The more vivid her hopes became of securing Jonathan Lumley,

Esq., M.P., the more revolting appeared her engagement with his humble rival. And in short, about the period of their gala, he had come to be considered a mere obstacle to the elevation of the woman who had more than met—who had *invited*—his advances.

Mr. Crosby, however, had his views as well as his fair lady, and he was capable of pursuing them with quite as unwearied perseverance. He had no expectation of fortune, and none of professional preferment. His hope of elevation in the world had rested on a lucky matrimonial speculation, and this—proh pudor!—was the end and aim of all his eloquence; his snow-white pocket handkerchief, used to display a hand that rivalled it in delicacy; his "point-device accoutrements." *His* eyes had long rested on the pew of the Brambles, and had detected, with a throb of rapture, the responsive glances of the eldest daughter of that wealthy house. He had assiduously sought an introduction, and finding, improved it. He was by no means blind to the waning affection of the fair Lucy, but that

—although if it had been within his choice, he would have preferred its retaining its original ardour,—did not greatly discourage him. Too enamoured, in the first instance, to be cautious, Miss Bramble's letters were so unequivocal as to render her position no enviable one, should she really meditate the dismissal of a lover who would not be dismissed. Mr. Crosby had none of that sensitive refinement which would have deemed it base even to threaten such an *exposé* to the woman whom he had affected to love. Advancement in the world was the goal towards which he pressed with an ardour, that rendered principle—honour—delicacy—but as weights that retarded his progress. Miss Bramble's avoidance of an interview, which she had managed on various pretexts, did not render his entreaties for the indulgence at all the less importunate. Nor, because her letters were rare, did he avail himself at all the less frequently of the means of communication which she, with the ingenuity of female scheming, had contrived to establish between them. He was by no means a stranger

to the ambitious aims to which Sir Joseph's knighthood had awakened his family. Whilst he derided the fancied dignity,—for he had worldly knowledge enough to estimate it at its full worth of contempt,—he was not insensible to the stumbling-block it might prove in his path. He knew well enough that, in his career, an alliance with a *ci-devant* tradesman, knighted *par accident* during his mayoralty—would be, *per se*, worse than useless, because there was a certain ridicule attached to it; but the wealth that belonged to the knight *must* be shared by his family, and to what was not wealth available?—Reasoning thus, Mr. Crosby adhered to his original views with praiseworthy consistency. His letters insinuated a gentle indignation at the cruel silence of the lady, and hinted at the holy and hallowed claims of first love,—reiterated his protestations of a constancy that death itself should not terminate,—breathed alarm at the gay and accomplished rivals with whom he must have to contend, and to compete with whom his principal weapon must be

the fondness—the devotedness of his attachment. "Her silence," he wrote, "harrowed him with apprehensions, the slightest of which brought absolute torture as its companion. He heard rumours which would drive him to despair,—and what man could answer for his actions when excited by the madness of desperation?"

The letter containing the last paragraph was drawn from her reticule immediately after breakfast by the faithless damsel, to be made the subject of a confidential discussion with her sister.

"I cannot help saying," began Margaret, after having perused it, "that considering your reputation for shrewdness, and the little of what I should call romance you have in your character, how you could possibly commit yourself in this way is beyond *my* understanding."

"Everybody does a foolish thing once in their lives," returned Miss Bramble, with a *little* asperity in her tone; "happy they to whose experience it occurs only once. Do you think

I am not as sensible of the folly of the thing as you? Recollect, the correspondence commenced three years since."

"I am afraid," said Margaret, shaking her head sagaciously, "you will have some difficulty in terminating it."

"So am I," returned Lucy with a sigh that corroborated her words. "If it were not for the *talk* there would be in the town, should Crosby show the letters, which I dare say he would do, depend on it I would cut the concern this day."

"Let him show them if he dares!" said Margaret, with decision, for she had much more courage than her sister. "He *may* be capable of such an action, but I do not think he will be rash enough really to venture it;—he might find it rather dangerous in *his* profession, if we were to represent it in the proper quarter."

"I wish I could think so!" sighed Lucy.

"Make the experiment."

"I dare not. Besides, how could I?"

"If you really want my advice, the only means of escape I can possibly see, are, that

you should disclose the whole affair to Sir Joseph," — since his accession of title, the senior Miss Brambles had ceased to use the word "papa,"—" and request him to write to Crosby and say, that he has prohibited all future correspondence between him and his daughter. Nothing can be easier, and as to Sir Joseph's *real* displeasure, you know very well we can manage him just as we please."

Lucy hesitated. —" Crosby is rather handsome, it must be allowed," she said. " If he had interest and any chance of a deanery, or bishoprick,—I should not be much inclined to break off with him."

Margaret opened her eyes in astonishment.

" A deanery or a bishoprick! — Grant me patience, Lucy, you might as well talk of a throne!"

" Strange things *have* happened. Look at the bench of bishops at this present moment."

" Well—really I have not another word to say. If you are mad enough for a hope—a thought—of such a possibility, you are farther

gone than I fancied you, and all I can wish is, that 'the course of true love may for once run smooth.'"

"That is being too ridiculous," said Miss Bramble pettishly. "I have no intention of sacrificing my present prospects to mere possibilities."

"*Im*possibilities rather, if you allude to deaneries and mitres for unconnected curates," said Margaret. "All I desire is, that you would discover your own wishes before I venture to give my advice. Decide on being Mrs. Crosby, at the fag-end of society, or Mrs. Lumley in the upper walks of life."

"I *have* decided, and certainly never mean to give tea-and-bread-and-butter parties in the character of a curate's wife."

"But to go to court as the lady of an M.P. A very sensible decision, and one I greatly commend. Have you any better plan of ridding yourself of Crosby than that I proposed?"

"None;—but—in short, Margaret, I fear I have not courage to dare the exposure of the engagement."

"Then I pity you!—What do you dread?—Sir Joseph's displeasure will evaporate immediately, nor would it be very terrific even if it were more enduring. As to Tom, he will be wise to be silent. His attentions to Mrs. Ellis are tolerably marked, I think, and if I mistake not, Ellis himself is rather fidgety on the occasion."

"No, no,—I care for nothing on that head. But to be the talk of every scandalous set in the place!"

"Yes, but *what* sets?—Not *ours*, you know, and being *above* the chance of hearing, why should we be annoyed? Let them talk, my dear Lucy;—Mr. Crosby will be well consoled amongst them, and perhaps may throw his willows at the feet of one of them, who will be much better qualified to darn his stockings and nurse his children, than the eldest daughter of Sir Joseph Bramble."

"But there is a remoter consequence which you overlook, Margaret," said Lucy gravely, and blushing more deeply than could have been expected considering how long she had

outlived that weakness. "It is quite true that Mr. Lumley's attentions were very marked last night, indeed so much so that, without vanity, I think I may calculate on having made a serious impression *there;*—you yourself must have observed them. Still I am not so sure of him as to be easy regarding the probable effect a knowledge of my foolish entanglement might produce."

"Ten to one if he hears a word of it. Remember how very little he mixes with the canaille of Coleminster."

"But the Perrys would have such pleasure in communicating it!—Barbara has always had a *penchant* for Lumley."

"For his fortune and position, I suppose.—In short, Lucy, you have a choice of evils, and it seems to me there is no end to your objections. The thing resolves itself into a very small compass;—you must dismiss Mr. Crosby —(the wretch!)—or marry him."

"That I will not do."

"Adopt the alternative."

"At any rate—I will not—that is—in short, Margaret, manage it your own way."

[illegible]

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Crosby, however, was not to be intimidated by the veto of Sir Joseph into giving up his views so easily.

Very early in the morning after Sir Joseph's letter was despatched, the following answer arrived.

TO SIR JOSEPH BRAMBLE, KNT.

SIR,

The pain and mortification inflicted by your letter I shall not attempt to describe. That I am deeply—constantly—unchangeably attached to your daughter, far from denying, I am proud to acknowledge, and never would that attachment have been shrouded in mystery, but at the express command of her whose slightest wish has ever been imperative with me. During three years the beloved object to whom I al-

[illegible] enlightened [illegible] —the hope of one day [illegible] has animated my efforts to [illegible] in my profession which [illegible] to [illegible] my [illegible] affection, and to claim my bride under [illegible] circumstances as would not degrade her even in the eye of the most worldly. Such, Sir, were my views and hopes, and I venture to believe that a man of sense and candour like yourself will not deem them derogatory either to my own character or the preference evinced by your daughter. It is, and ever will be, the boast of my life, that however humble my merits may be, compared with her transcendant excellence, she deemed them deserving of the honour of her regard. In the midst of those disappointments which must mark the progress of human existence, the recollection of the tenderness with which I knew myself regarded by one of the most exalted of her sex, has been the balm of my sorrows,—the hope, the assurance of happier days. I put it to yourself, whether, honoured as I know I am

by an attachment corresponding in strength and ardour with my own, I can consent to relinquish what by every moral, every social obligation, must be pronounced my *dearest right?* It is impossible to conceive that my adored Lucy can desire such a termination of our vows;—her letters, which are my most precious treasure, put so fearful a contingence beyond even *my* apprehensions. Unworthy indeed should I be of those reiterated assurances of attachment, the record of which it is my daily delight to peruse, if I consented to relinquish my claims to the dear hand that penned them. Not even a paternal command can render nugatory the promises, the pledges, which it has been my happiness to receive, and will be my constant effort to deserve. I have not taken advantage of an inexperienced girl, whose extreme youth might be supposed to render her an easy prey to an insidious deceiver. Miss Bramble's understanding is matured; her years are beyond the limit at which the laws of our country pronounce her a free agent. The unripe intellect of a child would have afforded no companion-

ship to mine, nor could I have relied on a preference which might have been the mere effervescence of a girlish fancy. My respect for my beloved Lucy, equals even my devoted affection, nor could I endure that she should be exposed to those imputations which the sudden cessation of our correspondence must necessarily excite. It is a trite remark, that in affairs of this nature the immediate connexions of the parties are generally the last to arrive at a knowledge of them. I believe that yours is almost the only family in Coleminster, that is not aware of the engagement existing between me and Miss Bramble. I suggest that, in justice to *her*, I cannot obey your hard mandate to 'think of her no more.' I feel that our destinies are linked for ever, and that I am not less bound to her by honour than by the ties of affection. It is true, that my present income is inadequate to her support in such a sphere as that to which she has been accustomed; but her own sweet assurances that she would submit to struggle with any privation *for* me and *with* me, emboldens me to suggest that, after this

éclaircissement, the sooner our union takes place the better. If you think fit to manifest your disapprobation of a measure I must still consider essential to your daughter's happiness, by withholding her portion, how much soever we may regret your estrangement, we must endeavour to conform our habits to our circumstances, and find our consolation in the enjoyment of mutual affection.

Yours, most respectfully,

GEORGE CROSBY.

Poor Sir Joseph! The letter so bewildered him, that he handed it to his daughter Margaret, without a single comment.

Margaret read it, and flew up stairs with it in search of her sister, who had taken refuge in her own apartment as soon as she saw the letter delivered to Sir Joseph, and recognised the autograph in her passing glance at the address.

"Only read what the monster has written!" said Margaret, half breathless with the speed she had used in her ascent. "I never heard

of such a wretch! What you are to do, Lucy, is really beyond my understanding."

Miss Bramble was already deep in the letter, and replied not. She read it hastily—again more slowly—a third time, with disdain and contempt expressed in every feature. At the conclusion, she burst into tears.

"Idiot that I was!" she cried. "A creature so pitiful as this!—such a letter!"

"Just what might be expected from a curate resolved to improve his condition at all events," said Margaret, who found it necessary to preserve her calmness if she wished her sister to be capable of making a decision which would brook no delay. "It is vain to regret the past; all we can do, is to provide for the future. Lucy, you must determine on something."

"Never—never—to marry *him*, that is fixed as fate or woman's resolution can make it," returned Miss Bramble, ever and anon glancing her eyes at the precious development of her lover's feelings and principles which was contained in his unrivalled letter.

"So much the better; you have decided in a

manner worthy of yourself. Let the man hector at his leisure, and take what measures he chooses," said the haughty Margaret. "Let him do what he dares, but some immediate step must be taken by yourself."

"I think I will visit our relations the Beaumonts;—I have had an invitation this age, and I should like to be out of the way until the nine days' wonder is past."

"Very unwise, and to be thought of only as a dernier ressort. You cannot conceal where you are gone; and suppose the man should follow you? I don't think your situation with the Beaumonts would, in that case, be very enviable."

"What *can* I do?"

"Write to him yourself. Assure him positively that you are personally disinclined to fulfil the engagement. Take from him every power of affecting to attribute your breaking with him to your father's authority. Assure him that it is the effect of reflection,—of an intimate examination of your own feelings,—of a conviction that, with your habits, life on a

limited income would be a series of miseries which must tend ultimately to alienate two individuals the most warmly attached imaginable. In short, let me write such a letter as I would send were the case my own, and copy it if you like."

Miss Bramble consented,—glad to be relieved from the necessity of thought requisite for such an undertaking.

The following letter was made out—approved—written—and sent:—

REV. GEORGE CROSBY.

DEAR SIR,

My father has laid before me your letter, in answer to a communication addressed to you by him on the subject of our unfortunate engagement. The tone of that letter has filled me with surprise and vexation, and I think, on reconsidering the contents, you will agree with me that it was written hastily and unadvisedly.

The style of my latter letters to you must have prepared you for a termination of our correspondence. Deeply as I must ever regret

the indiscretion which led to its commencement, I by no means intend to attribute to you any share in the imprudence. My own girlish thoughtlessness and inexperience of the world were at once the source of my error, and its best apology, if it admit of any.

From certain expressions in your letter to Sir Joseph, I am led to draw the conclusion, that you consider the meditated dissolution of our engagement as an act of authority forced by him on my will, and adopted by me with reluctance. Painful as must be the avowal of fickleness, inconstancy, and vacillation of affection, candour and truth compel me to avow that such an impression is most erroneous. Inured as I am to certain habits of life,—to certain social indulgencies, not extravagant in my father's position, but quite incompatible with yours,—I feel it impossible so to change those habits as to descend to the severe economy, without the exercise of which a wife, in place of being a comfort and a helpmeet for you, would be an incumbrance and a burden. Do not delude yourself into the belief, that, admit-

ting our union once took place, Sir Joseph would be reconciled, and would seal his reconciliation by supplying the deficiencies of our income;—I have had too much experience of his temper and modes of thinking, to venture to anticipate any such result. His firmness is at least equal to his apparent quietude, and his resentment would be durable in proportion to the disappointment which such an union could not fail of inflicting on him.

The sincerity of your affection for me, I do not for an instant doubt. It is only after a long and painful struggle that I myself have been wrought to take this step, as the one most conducive to the permanent happiness of both parties. It is not to be supposed, that in forming an engagement with me, you had the least expectation of worldly advantage. Indeed, the disinterested proposal contained in your last letter, of receiving me without a dower from my father, must be demonstrative to the most sceptical on this point. Yet the least selfish might justifiably calculate on the misery he must incur by marrying a portionless woman, inured

from childhood to habits so expensive and so uneconomical as my own.

Once more receive from myself the positive assurance, that all correspondence between us, in the relation of lovers, closes with this letter. As a friend, I shall always feel deeply interested in your welfare, and if, hereafter,—when, probably, each of us may have formed new connexions, I should have the power of serving you, believe that no person on earth would exert it with greater zeal or delight.

Yours truly,

LUCY BRAMBLE.

When the letter was absolutely despatched, Miss Bramble became lightened of half her fears for its result. She reflected with satisfaction on the decison of its tone, and aided by the consolations of Margaret, began to fancy that it would prove quite as satisfactory to her lover as to herself.

Vain hope!—A very few hours brought the following billet from the forlorn Crosby.

TO MISS BRAMBLE.

Your cruel letter has driven me to distraction. I cannot be persuaded that you seriously mean what you have written. You cannot think that vows like ours are to be so lightly broken, —that a mere breath is sufficient to change or to still the strongest attachments of human nature. At any rate, nothing but your own voice shall persuade me of the reality of the horrors which threaten me. I *must* see you; the when and where I leave to you.

Your miserable but faithful,

GEORGE CROSBY.

Unfortunate Miss Bramble! How the chains which she had forged for herself galled her! How she bewailed the day when, quitting the beaten path of common life, she had ventured to wander into the forbidden precincts of romance! How she abhorred—spurned—loathed —the sacerdotal dandyism which had profaned the precincts of the sanctuary, and led her into a dilemma, from which it seemed

every moment more impossible to extricate herself!

Margaret, however,—the shrewd and clever Margaret,—was at fault only a few seconds. "We will tell every thing to Tom," said she, "and leave it to him. Rely on his settling Mr. George Crosby,—with all his perseverance."

And to this exposure, which she dreaded only less than a marriage with Crosby, the unhappy Miss Bramble was obliged to consent.

Doctor Tom raved—how he raved!—at the folly of women in general, and of his sister in particular. At first, he absolutely refused to interfere at all in an affair which, he said, reflected disgrace on every party concerned in it. At length the tears of Lucy, and the persuasion of Margaret, somewhat shook his stern purpose, and rather than endanger the alternative of being obliged to receive the curate of St. John's as his brother-in-law, he addressed himself to the encounter.

How Lucy's heart trembled as the angry Doctor stalked from the door, intent on pouring

forth a volume of invective and denunciation on the presumptuous divine! Once or twice, she admitted a suspicion, that going to church with Crosby would have been the less evil of the two.

CHAPTER V.

MR. CROSBY was at home.

Doctor Tom ascended the narrow staircase with a step that was intended to sound ominously grand and majestic, and which did, in truth, cause some unpleasant emotion in the object whom it was designed to affect. He was discussing his early dinner of cold meat, and the small room was redolent of that salient vegetable which Doctor Tom held in most especial abhorrence. Moreover, his dishabille was by no means of that elegant description which he would voluntarily have exhibited to any stranger,—far less to the brother of the woman whom he was seeking to marry, and whom, despite even of herself, he had *resolved* to marry.

Doctor Tom exerted to the utmost his capabilities for the dignified. His entrée was courteous in the extreme, as if, imitating the example of the ancient nobles of Spain in their manner to the *parvenus*, he was resolved, by his scrupulous politeness, to remind his companion of the immeasurable distance that really divided their spheres.

Mr. Crosby was not a man to feel embarrassment on any ordinary occasion. Mauvaise honte is the last quality in the world to be cultivated by a person who has his own way to make, and who has established it in his mind as an indisputable theorem, that a certain goal *must* ultimately and infallibly be attained by him. Nevertheless, at this moment he *was* embarrassed. The appanages of discomfort by which he was surrounded,—the inelegance of his toilet,—an intimate persuasion of the nature of the business which had procured him the honour of the present visit, were, it must be confessed, sufficient reasons for the intrusion of this unwelcome and unaccustomed sensation. Endeavouring to escape from the awkwardness

of it, he uttered a slight apology for the negligent appearance of the apartment,—attributed his early dinner to the necessity he was under of going some distance to attend a funeral this afternoon,—spoke of the universal slovenliness of students,—rang the bell,—talked of the weather whilst the fragments of his meal were removed,—threw open the window to allow the overpowering odours to escape,—and by that time had completely regained his self-possession; a fact which was as manifest to Doctor Tom as to himself, but to whom it afforded by no means equal satisfaction.

"My visit, Mr. Crosby," began the Doctor, "I regret to say, originates in my desire of discussing with you, fairly and dispassionately, a business of a most unpleasant nature."

"Fair and dispassionate discussion can scarcely be a matter of regret," said Mr. Crosby, with a smile of superiority, taking advantage of Doctor Tom's *lapsus*.

"We will waive criticism, if you please," said the visitor, colouring deeply and contracting his brow. "The subject to *be* discussed is

the cause of my regret,—or if you like the word better,—my sorrow—my grief."

Mr. Crosby bowed, and was all attention; which rather annoyed Doctor Tom, as it compelled him to diverge from that line of proceeding which he had laid down for himself, on the supposition that Mr. Crosby would *at least* affect ignorance.

Mr. Crosby, however, was a better tactician than to pioneer for his adversary. He was most perseveringly silent.

"The unfortunate and youthful infatuation of Miss Bramble ———."

"Infatuation!" echoed Mr. Crosby, and it was now his turn to feel his colour heighten.

"You are nice about terms, sir.—Let it be *attachment*, if you choose it,—but attachment in the past tense *only*."

"The engagement between Miss Bramble and myself, if your allusions point to that, is of too serious a nature to be dissolved lightly by either of us," said Mr. Crosby gravely. "My correspondence with your sister commenced after the age at which the law establishes the

free-agency of any individual; I took no advantage of youth and inexperience,—I myself was not—am not—hackneyed in the ways of the world. The attachment with which I have been honoured, and which is more precious to me than my life, was not sought dishonourably."

"*Clandestinely* it was, Mr. Crosby," said Doctor Tom with an air of great severity. "So much mystery enveloped its origin and progress, that it would still have remained unknown, if my sister, shrinking from the disappointment she must inflict on the hopes of her family,—from the privations she must endure if she persisted in carrying it to its ultimate issue,—had not herself revealed it. In a word, it is by her express desire that I am here, to assure you it is her irrevocable—her unalterable—resolution, to terminate this unfortunate engagement instantly and for ever."

"Sir," said Mr. Crosby, "it is not by the medium of a third person that I can submit to receive so cruel a decision. From Miss Bramble herself only will I consent to hear my sentence.

Our engagement has been scarcely less solemn than the marriage vow, and by me has been deemed ever as sacred and inviolable. In a religious point of view, I consider myself as decidedly the husband of your sister, as your friend Mr. Ellis is of his wife."

The sting took effect, as Mr. Crosby meant it should, when he so unceremoniously introduced the Ellises as an illustration of his argument. Doctor Tom's countenance was covered with a crimson suffusion, and he looked away from Mr. Crosby.

The latter saw, and pursued his advantage.

"Yes," he continued, "I should consider that man scarcely less immoral who should interpose to separate me from Miss Bramble, than he who should dare to invade the marriage-vow, by attempting a disunion between husband and wife."

"Custom and the law decide differently," said Doctor Tom, with an effort. "Laying aside all romance, let us view this matter with the common sense of people who know the world. A marriage between Miss Bramble and

a gentleman of your situation and prospects, is —the emergency renders my language plain— the last thing on earth her family would approve. But a yet stronger argument against it is, the present disinclination of the lady. We need not seek the cause of her change in any remote circumstances;—we may attribute it to the natural inconstancy of the sex. Women, you know, are proverbially fickle," added Doctor Tom, aiming at the facetious.

"I cannot permit Miss Bramble to be so lightly esteemed, even by her brother," said Mr. Crosby, with an air of most dignified magnanimity.

"Miss Bramble herself has assured you of her fickleness," persisted Doctor Tom.

"By letter *only*," replied Mr. Crosby with emphasis. "How do I know under what influence that letter may have been written—what persuasion may have deluded—what force compelled?—In a word,—for my time is not my own at this moment,—from the lips of Miss Bramble alone will I consent to receive a declar-

[illegible] which nothing else can induce me to believe [illegible] on her part."

"And this is your final decision?"

"My ultimatum."

"Miss Bramble will not consent to such a step."

Mr. Crosby smiled incredulously.

"In fine," said Doctor Tom, rising, "it is by her express desire that I inform you, she will meet you henceforth only as a stranger. Having faithfully executed the commission with which she entrusted me, I shall no longer detain you.—Good morning to you."

And without waiting to receive a reciprocal salutation, lest it might be accompanied with some yet more explicit declaration, Doctor Tom left the house.

It would be impossible to paint the discomposure of Miss Bramble when Doctor Tom communicated the unsatisfactory result of his visit. Her resolution even began to waver. She doubted whether she should have sufficient nerve to carry the business through.

Doctor Tom became indignant at such a display of weakness, and Margaret sarcastic. The one harangued on the degradation of such an alliance to the Brambles,—the other enlarged on the delights of the ménage of the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Crosby, supported by a hundred pounds per annum. Lucy scolded and wept by turns, until she at length "screwed her courage to the sticking pitch," and resolved, at all seasons and on all occasions, *to cut the wretch Crosby dead.*

An opportunity presented itself in the course of a very few days, attended with all the publicity that could give éclat to the breach between the quondam lovers. The scene was the market-place, on the pavement of which the Miss Brambles were walking, attended by Jonathan Lumley, Esquire, M.P., and Sir Charles March, who, *par parenthese*, had been philandering Margaret with the most persevering assiduity, ever since the memorable night of his first introduction at the house of Sir Joseph Bramble.

Mr. Crosby saw the party at a distance, and

had sufficient time to arrange his tactics. It was by no means his intention to avoid the encounter; on the contrary, he rather rejoiced that a scene of some kind would occur in the presence of the Member for the borough, as he was not without certain shrewd suspicions of the designs of his fickle fair one on that honourable gentleman.

Miss Bramble was the first to descry his approach, of which she gave notice to her sister by a forcible pressure of her arm. Margaret whispered a brief exhortation of courage, and the sisters walked on with rather more stateliness than usual, and with an affectation of being engaged in the most lively chit-chat imaginable, with a man who was thought miserably dull—even amongst the silent Members at St. Stephen's chapel.

Margaret tossed her head with so much emphasis as to excite certain apprehensions in the spectator of the dislocation of the joint. Indeed, she was celebrated for her excellence in exhibiting this indication of hauteur and superciliousness. Miss Bramble contented

herself with looking straight before her,—suffering her eyes to diverge neither to the right nor to the left, until the moment when the belligerent parties met.

Mr. Crosby advanced boldly with extended hand, whilst Mr. Lumley and Sir Charles March, not being aware of the existing state of things, ruined the manœuvre of the ladies, by making a full stop, supposing, of course, that there existed such an intimacy between them and Mr. Crosby as warranted so familiar an approach on his part.

Margaret quickly recovered her ground;—"Good morning to you, Mr. Crosby," she said, passing on and drawing her sister with her,—"we are in great haste."

"Miss Bramble will permit my attendance," persisted the unwelcome intruder, turning back as if to accompany them. "My walk is merely for recreation, and where can I enjoy it so completely as in her society?"

If looks *could* kill, Margaret would have frowned him dead.—Lucy gathered courage from the exigency of the case to say—"You

know my sentiments, Sir, and it is my particular desire that you do not persist in accompanying us."

"Is it possible?—can I believe—" he began.

"Really," interrupted Margaret, impatiently, "this is no place for scenes and discussions of this kind, Mr. Crosby. You are already aware that your presence is unwelcome."

"Allow your sister to assure me of it," said Mr. Crosby loudly, and resolutely accompanying them.

"You will oblige me to return," said Miss Bramble, "if you persist in this extraordinary conduct,—my resolution is final."

"How can I have been so unfortunate as to offend you?—How have I deserved to lose your esteem?" persevered Mr. Crosby, whose honourable object now was to give as much publicity to the affair as possible.

"My own wishes are in accordance with my father's commands," said Miss Bramble, with a resolution strengthened by her allowable indignation at the indelicate pertinacity

of the deserted lover. Bowing coldly and haughtily she passed on with a firm step, leaving him standing in the middle of the pavement, stupified by rage at the discomfiture he had sustained.

Sir Charles March looked his inquiries, but said nothing. Jonathan Lumley, Esquire, M.P., smiled sarcastically, and resolved within himself, that he, at least, would never incur the danger of being placed in so uncomfortable a predicament as the unfortunate curate. And he kept his resolution unbroken.

CHAPTER VI.

An event occurred which occupied "the universal heart" of Coleminster. Parliament was dissolved, and writs were issued for the return of new members.

The interest felt by such leading people as Sir Joseph Bramble and his family, may be imagined. It had the effect of rousing the old knight from that state of lethargy into which he was rapidly sinking;—it diverted the attention of his eldest son from the painful calculations of the losses he was daily sustaining by his farm;—it shared the thoughts of Doctor Tom with the morning-star of his devotion, the fair Mrs. Ellis;—it consoled Miss Bramble for the evident defection of Jonathan Lumley, Esquire, no longer M.P.;—it rendered Margaret's triumph over the heart of Sir Charles

March tenfold more delightful, and determined her on taking a high place at the election-ball, which *must* occur, to celebrate the victory of the conquering party, and to sustain the spirits of the defeated, by appearing as LADY MARCH, and *a bride.*

The feelings of the whole family, however, became tenfold more animated, when it was ascertained that Mr. Arthur Herbert, a very distant relation of the late Lady Bramble, who possessed an estate in the county, was about to present himself as a candidate for the honours of a knight of the shire.

Letters of invitation were despatched without delay, setting forth the plea of family connexion, the advantages such an abode must afford him during the approaching contest, severe as it was expected to be,—every inducement that could be offered to tempt him to become the guest of Sir Joseph Bramble.

Mr. Herbert's letter of thanks and acceptance arrived, and the Miss Brambles addressed themselves assiduously to the task of adding every article of luxury or convenience

to the furniture of the apartments to be appropriated to their distinguished guest,—a duty that might almost be considered a work of supererogation, since the house had been expensively and completely fitted up since Sir Joseph's acquisition of the dignity of a title.

Poor Sir Joseph himself was but a reluctant party to the invitation sent to his wife's kinsman. He ventured a remonstrance on the enormous expense that must inevitably be incurred by his making his house a kind of hotel at such a juncture. But all this was overruled by his children, who overwhelmed him with the representations of the importance it must give him,—the opening it would afford to his family, and the prospect of their forming splendid alliances,—not to dwell on the fact that Mr. Herbert himself was *unmarried*, and many greater impossibilities were of daily occurrence, than that he should render his connexion with the Bramble family closer by an union with one of its daughters.

To give the fair Lucy her due, this consideration had not for a moment escaped her.

For three years she had been accustomed to the conscious importance of having a lover, and she felt herself a much smaller person, now that she had no tributary to her power. She had half suspected, as she missed that great occupation of the latter part of her existence,—the writing of love-letters, and contriving meetings with her lover,—that she had been rather premature in dismissing Mr. Crosby,—that it would have been more prudent to wait until Jonathan Lumley, Esquire, *then* M.P.,—(we always attach all his dignities to his name, as he himself never omitted them, even on a visiting card,) —had been more decided in his attentions, more explicit in his declarations;—that, in a word, a curate was better than nobody, and at all events answered very well as a *pis-aller*. Miss Bramble—"tell it not in Gath"—was verging towards that angle of human life, *thirty*, the other side of which is no longer *youth*. She had occasionally suffered from the nightmare of unmarried damsels,—a dread of *old-maidism*. She had been *too* secure of her wealthy admirer, to be cautious respecting her

poor one, and she was reaping the fruits of her inconsideration in the loss of both. To her, therefore, the vista of the election appeared like a vision of Paradise. The candidate—her relation,—the inmate of a house of which she was the mistress,—the guest at a table of which she did the honours! What could present a more auspicious prospect? Her heart throbbed high with anticipation, and she resolved that, if she were to suffer defeat, it should not be from the want of able generalship.

Margaret was most laudably constant in her attachment to Sir Charles March. The *title* had attractions for her which no wealth could counterbalance. The bare contemplation of being saluted as "Lady March," made her heart beat and her ears tingle. To be sure, she did not precisely know the nature of her admirer's rank, nor the manner of its acquirement. He rarely alluded to his former life more specifically than by detailing certain naval adventures, which proved that the sea was his element. She had pored over the Navy List, until she was familiar with the

names of half the officers in the service, but she did not recognise that of her lover. She concluded therefore that he had retired, for she was quite positive he had once belonged to the profession;—she remembered so well how often he had spoken of *his* ship!

These passing thoughts, however, did not annoy her, nor did they recur frequently. She felt that Sir Charles March's countenance and manner were letters of recommendation, which abundantly authenticated his claims to consideration. Besides, he certainly was a relation of the very proud young man who had introduced him; his *family*, therefore, was unexceptionable, and that was so essential, since the arms of the Brambles had been but newly obtained from the Herald's office.

The preparations were completed;—the sisters surveyed the apartments with the nicest scrutiny, and were at length satisfied that nothing which taste could suggest, or money supply, was omitted. At the precise moment when all was in order for his reception,—the dinner ready to be served,—the two men-servants in

their best livery,—the two ladies—we forget the third as completely as she was forgotten by her sisters—in their best looks and most elegant array,—Mr. Alfred Herbert alighted at the door from his travelling carriage.

Miss Bramble saw, with a glance, that the personal appearance of the candidate was such as to increase immeasurably the eligibility of an union with him. He had the most aristocratic *tournure*, she thought, that had ever distinguished any individual of her acquaintance. His manners, too, were so perfectly gentlemanlike,—so easy, yet so devoid of vulgar familiarity,—so gay, yet unstained by levity,—so full of *retenue*, and yet untouched by the slightest pride or self-complacency. The splendour of Sir Charles March—hitherto "the glass of fashion and the mould of form"—shone with a pale and ineffectual light in comparison.

The dinner passed off remarkably well. The servants did not commit above half a dozen blunders, and one or two dishes were really fit for an epicure. The ladies adjourned to the

drawing-room in the best possible mood, and proceeded to re-arrange their curls and adjust their folds, preparatory to the musical exhibitions which it was their intention, should furnish the entertainments of the evening.

Nothing could exceed their surprise when Sir Joseph and Doctor Tom entered the drawing-room, unaccompanied by their distinguished guest.

"Where is Mr. Herbert?" was asked simultaneously by both sisters.

"Gone out," replied Sir Joseph, who saw nothing of very alarming import in this demonstration of free-will on the part of his guest.

"Gone out?—Where upon earth can he be gone?" said Lucy in great indignation.

"That does not appear on the face of the record," said Doctor Tom, who was quite as much disconcerted as Lucy herself. "He charged us to make his apologies to you for an absence that would not exceed an hour, but which he was compelled to make on the most indispensable business. He felt, he said,

the charge of inattention to which such a proceeding must subject him, but as he was about to be your guest for many days, he trusted you would allow him to avail himself of a kinsman's privilege, to act as if he were at home."

"A very pretty oration, and the gentleman is practising speech-making in time," said Margaret sarcastically.

"I had not the least idea Mr. Herbert had a single acquaintance in Coleminster, except ourselves," said Lucy musing.

"He may have received letters from some influential people, of which it may be necessary to say nothing, but to which he must pay early attention," said Doctor Tom with the air of a person elucidating a difficult problem. "At any rate he *is* gone, and I would not have you, Lucy, discompose your features by an expression of bad temper. You really look remarkably pretty this evening."

Soothed by this fraternal compliment, Miss Bramble preserved her equanimity. The restless spirit of Margaret, however, was not

so easily quieted. She ran on with a string of conjectures on the probable causes of his absence, until she had exhausted her brother's patience, and sent Sir Joseph to sleep. She was in the very midst of a long diatribe on the *rudeness* of his absenting himself, when his authoritative knock at the door, loud enough to startle the neighbourhood, somewhat appeased her wrath.

He entered, and made his apologies to Miss Bramble with such an air of frank and polished courtesy, that it was impossible to be dissatisfied with him. As if to obliterate all recollection of his desertion, he exerted himself to be agreeable, and speedily convinced the whole circle that he was irresistible. Miss Bramble uttered a soft sigh, and began to recall sundry fancies of her youth on the subject of love at first sight; but Margaret, who had no personal interest in the matter, and was gifted with a larger share than ordinary of that quality which is said to be at the root of all man's progress and discoveries in science and philosophy,—*curiosity*,—remarked that he never once

alluded to the *cause* of his strange absence. If she retired for the night restless in her ignorance, the fault did not originate with herself. With all the address she possessed, she contrived continually to bring the conversation to bear on Mr. Herbert's acquaintance with Coleminster, which she did the more easily, as they naturally talked of the support he was likely to receive, should, as might be expected, a severe contest occur. But the gentleman's tact excelled hers;—he answered with the greatest candour every inquiry that could be ventured, but it was quite evident that he had no intention of advancing from the candid to the confidential.

CHAPTER VII.

SUNDAY arrived. The progress Mr. Herbert had been making in the good graces of Sir Joseph Bramble's family was amazing. Miss Bramble had absolutely whispered to her sister, that she suspected she had never before felt the sentiment of *real love*,—that the flame that had formerly misled her, was a mere *ignis fatuus*, which she had all the while mistaken for the beaming of a star. Margaret spoke encouragingly, and strengthened the hopes of Lucy by enumerating a thousand symptoms of the gentleman's preference which her penetrating eye had discovered. And in proportion to her wishes was Miss Bramble's faith.

Sunday is a great day for exhibition in

provincial towns, amongst that class of persons to which the family of the Brambles belonged. They had indulged in glowing anticipations of the delight of exhibiting, in their train, to the eye of the whole congregation, the elegant stranger who was to play so conspicuous a part in the county. And it must be confessed, that they walked down the aisle, graced as they were by his attendance, with countenances radiant with triumph and satisfaction. Every body looked curious,—and a large majority envious, which was precisely the state of mind in which the Miss Brambles loved to place their friends in relation to themselves.

The service passed on as usual. Poor Mr. Crosby officiated, but Miss Bramble had changed her place, in the resolution of not facing him. He blundered a good deal, and unfortunately evinced, that his thoughts were not engrossed as they ought to have been. Margaret tossed her head more loftily than ever, Doctor Tom looked more pompous than usual by elevating his chin at least an inch

above the plane of the horizon. In short, the whole exhibition was one the least suited to the time and the place,—a violation of all that ought to be felt by miserable man when he enters the temple dedicated to the worship of his Maker. Pride, scorn, all manner of uncharitableness, filled the hearts of those whose lips were breathing prayers of penitence, and peace, and brotherly love. Doctor Tom was even darting such glances at Mrs. Ellis as *she* could not misinterpret, and which were received with such smiles of levity as encouraged their repetition, and sanctioned him in indulging the most unhallowed hopes. If such characters ever could be sensible of a tacit reproach, Mr. Herbert's whole manner would have conveyed one. It must have been evident to the least acute observer, that that composed and serene countenance was the index of such a state of mind as befitted the place and the occasion.

The service concluded. The usual greetings occurred in the church-yard, and Mr. Herbert was drawn into two or three introductions.

There was, it must be confessed, a little impatience in his manner, but his companions attributed it to hauteur,—a feeling they could understand and admire. They passed up the long street leading from the church, surrounded by a group of very showy people, laughing over the approaching election, and discussing, after the manner of women, the politics of the place. Mr. Herbert did *not* offer his arm to either of his companions, which surprised both, and quite shocked Miss Bramble, who considered herself entitled to the privilege of his support. He began to evince a certain degree of restlessness before they had proceeded half the length of the street, and at last, with an abruptness that quite shocked Margaret's propriety, professed to see a person at a distance to whom he must absolutely speak, and whom accordingly he walked away to join, at a most rapid pace.

The eyes of Lucy,—of *all* the Brambles, —followed him, with an expression of mingled curiosity and anger. Probably, they thought, they should now be enlightened on a point

that had caused them considerable anxiety,—*who* was the person he had visited on the first night of his arrival at Coleminster. And they *were* enlightened.

He was—yes, positively—he was stopping with *Miss Orme!* Miss Orme, who had disappeared from Coleminster during the last six months,—until, indeed, in her enviable obscurity, she had almost ceased to be thought of! People had forgotten to be censorious; no ill-natured report had been attached to her name from time immemorial. Once withdrawn from the eyes of the high and mighty of Coleminster, their minds retained no trace of a person whose doings had always, when she was amongst them, afforded them constant food for criticism. Yes;—to the horror of the Brambles,—to the extreme disgust of Doctor Tom,—Mr. Herbert had shaken hands with Miss Orme, and absolutely offered his arm to her mother! Was it in human nature to endure such an outrage with patience? Miss Bramble neither fainted nor went into hysterics, but she suppressed, with the greatest

difficulty, a sob of mingled rage and mortification. As to Margaret!—but language sinks beneath the might of the tempest that raged in her fair bosom.

Mr. Herbert did not join them until dinner-time. *Four hours with Miss Orme!*—What on earth did it mean?—Thrice did Margaret destroy the effect of a favourite curl by a sudden jerk of impatience, as she mentally resolved not to rest until she had penetrated this most mysterious acquaintance.

"So you know Miss Orme, Mr. Herbert," said she, swallowing a spoonful of soup so hot as to have been painful, but that her whole mind was occupied; and it is only "when the mind's free that the body's delicate."

"Yes," said Mr. Herbert, without evincing the slightest embarrassment,—indeed with a coolness that was rather wonderful, considering the posture of affairs.

"Do you like her?" said the fair questioner, with one of her most emphatic *tossings* of the head.

"Like her?" said Mr. Herbert with a smile,

—"I like all ladies, especially at election times."

"Well, thank Heaven I am not a candidate, if universal partiality be one of the conditions of success," returned Margaret in a glow of indignation.

"But then, if one's loving-kindness must extend to the old and the ugly, it embraces, *en revanche*, the young and lovely, and Miss Orme may counterbalance at least half a dozen plain and common-place women," said Mr. Herbert, who saw more of the game than his companions intended to display, and who began to be considerably amused by it.

"Oh, then it is to be inferred that you *do* admire Miss Orme!" continued Margaret with a sneer.

"Amazingly," he replied, but it was impossible to construe his real meaning, the inflection of his voice being most ambiguous.

"I confess *I* do not, though I believe she is quite an ally of Emma's. Have you nothing to say for your friend, child?" she continued,

turning petulantly to the young sister so often overlooked.

"Why should I?" said Emma quietly; "her cause appears to be in very good hands."

"Don't attempt to be witty, child," said Margaret with a sneer, "because nothing looks so ridiculous as a failure."

"I never dreamt of being witty," replied Emma, blushing to the temples at such a charge of presumption.

"But you *may* venture to think of being sensible and amiable, without the slightest probability of your '*awakening, and lo! it was a dream,*'" said Mr. Herbert,—like a good knight and true, coming to the defence of the oppressed.

"You have heard Emma's character from Miss Orme, I suppose?" said Margaret sarcastically; for having no personal design on Mr. Herbert, she was not at the trouble of restraining her temper in his presence.

"Precisely," he replied, with the greatest possible *retenue.*

"I never knew any harm of Miss Orme," said Sir Joseph. "I see no reason why she should be so much abused."

"*Abused!*" exclaimed Margaret. "My dear papa, I do not abuse her when I say simply that I do not like her."

"Never mind, Emmy," said Sir Joseph, patting the fair head of his youngest child; "Miss Orme is too clever to please women in general; that's all my dear. Don't be ashamed of your friend."

"I suppose you see her frequently," said Mr. Herbert, examining, with the greatest attention, a peach to which he had just helped himself.

"Why, no," said Miss Bramble, "we really have *not* seen much of her since—that is, within the last year. In fact, Miss Orme and ourselves move in such widely different circles, that it is hardly possible anything like intimacy could be agreeable to either party."

"Besides, Miss Orme is a perfect *precieuse*," said Doctor Tom authoritatively; and Mr. Herbert, as if overborne by the weight of the

opinions against the absent lady, changed the subject to matters of less moment to all parties.

The canvass proceeded,—pledges were given reciprocally by the candidate and the electors, and every thing boded a successful result. Dinners multiplied. Poor Sir Joseph, with all his inclination to hospitality, and all his gratified vanity, that his table was surrounded with titled and landed guests,—began to whisper to his family, that their present expenses very greatly exceeded his income. But the tide of opposition had set in too strongly against him. The Miss Brambles declared it to be absolutely impossible to turn Mr. Herbert out of the house, to which shutting the doors on his friends must inevitably be tantamount. Doctor Tom suggested that, great as the expenditure might be, a few weeks would terminate it, at the very longest, and they might easily recover themselves by subsequent retrenchment. And just now Mr. Herbert, being their guest, added so much to the dignity of the family,—might lead to the girls' marrying well,—might put *him* in

the way of rising in his profession, his diploma having hitherto been merely honorary!—In short, if Sir Joseph's feeble will were not overpowered by the cogency of the arguments of his children, it was subdued by the number of them, and their career of triumphant gaiety was unchecked.

But their path was not all brightness. Very few days passed over, without Mr. Herbert's being absent a short time during their progress. And unwilling as Margaret was to admit it, she was compelled to assent to her sister's suspicions, that those absences were to be placed to the account of Miss Orme. Emma was questioned and cross-questioned,—put, in fact, to that species of moral torture which might almost force the party into making admissions as widely removed from the truth as falsehood can be. But Emma declared positively and repeatedly, that though she herself passed much of her time with Miss Orme, she had never met Mr. Herbert there, which, Margaret suspected, *might* be the fact, as her visits were always made in the morning, at an hour when

Mr. Herbert was invariably occupied with electioneering matters. Emma frankly avowed, that Miss Orme acknowledged having known Mr. Herbert for many months, and she did not think she was guilty of any breach of trust by confessing, that books were very often sent to her from Mr. Herbert. Indeed, although she would not for the world venture to mention such a thing to Miss Orme herself, it was her own private opinion that Mr. Herbert would be very, very glad to marry her.

Upon which, Margaret became perfectly enraged, that such a chit should venture to have an opinion on a matter regarding which her age must necessarily prevent her being able to form any just judgment. She was resolved to discredit so monstrous a possibility. She assured Lucy, that such a thing never had occurred, and never would occur, as that a man of family and fortune, like Mr. Herbert, would think of entering on so unsuitable a connexion. To make poor, old, infirm Mrs. Orme, his mother-in-law!—What attractions did the daughter possess that could fascinate a

man into so gross a dereliction from all his preconceived ideas of the fitness of things?—Margaret staked her reputation for common penetration, that the thought was too absurd to be admitted by any rational person,—just fit to be "the coinage of such a brain as Emma's,—who always had been, and always would be, the most foolish person of their family."

Miss Bramble resolved to pin her faith on her sister's sagacity, to which she was the more encouraged, by witnessing the progress of her attachment to Sir Charles March. Sir Charles was now a daily visitor, and made himself so useful at the present juncture, and so agreeable to Doctor Tom, that the latter forgot to make those particular inquiries regarding his actual position in the world, which Sir Charles's assiduous attentions to his sister rendered desirable. Sir Joseph saw quite enough of what was passing, to be somewhat surprised that Sir Charles did not make those matrimonial proposals which every day's occurrences proved to be his ultimate design.

Margaret herself sometimes admitted a wonder, that week after week passed away, and yet her *trousseau* was not ordered. She was secretly chagrined at this lingering delay, and began to think of admonishing Doctor Tom to inquire of Sir Charles, *why* things were not placed on a proper footing, and to hint at the expediency of an explanation's taking place without further loss of time. It was Margaret's positive intention to appear as Lady March at the election-ball, and she felt that expedition was therefore absolutely necessary.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was so early as eleven o'clock on the following morning,—before Sir Joseph Bramble's family had quitted the breakfast-table,—when Mrs. Bramble's carriage drove to their door, and herself appeared within it, with a face so pregnant with meaning, that Margaret could not refrain from whispering to her sister, "Really our accomplished sister-in-law looks as if she were, at length, about to prove herself capable of an idea."

Mrs. Bramble went through the ordinary greetings, with a mind manifestly pre-occupied. Her restlessness became more apparent every moment, and as soon as she caught the eye of Margaret, unobserved by the others, she managed to make a very expressive signal that

she had something of importance to communicate to her private ear.

Margaret, whose curiosity was at least equal to her faith in her own penetration, as soon as possible asked Mrs. Bramble to walk up stairs with her, as she wanted her opinion on a new article of female finery. Mrs. Bramble was not reluctant to accept the invitation, and the pair retired together.

As soon as they entered Margaret's apartment, Mrs. Bramble closed and locked the door. Even Margaret's nerves were somewhat shaken by this preparation. "What on earth is the matter, my dear creature?" she asked in most unusual trepidation.

"Indeed," said Mrs. Bramble, "it is with the greatest hesitation that I have brought myself to mention the subject to you at all; but it really appeared so clear to me, that standing in the relation I do to the family,—you have no mother, and I the wife of your elder brother, and consequently a leading member of it——"

"Humph!" said Margaret; "but surely,

my dear Mrs. Bramble, you did not think it necessary to seek a private interview with me, for the purpose of urging a topic which you very seldom evince any disinclination to discuss with all possible publicity."

Mrs. Bramble coughed down a reply which, by producing a premature fracas, would deprive her of the pleasure of witnessing the effect of the intelligence with which she was really charged.

"Believe me, Margaret," she said with matronly gravity, "I have no desire of bestowing either my advice or opinions, unsought, on any person,—particularly on *you*, with whom, I know, my influence is very small. However, certain facts have come to my knowledge which I think it my duty to communicate to you, as they are of the highest importance."

"I do not apprehend any thing very shocking," returned Margaret, with a slight approach to a sneer, "so pray do not let us waste time over one of the most useless things in the world in all cases—preparation."

"Very well, then;—are you quite aware of the situation in life of Sir Charles March?"

Margaret coloured violently. "What have I to do with Sir Charles March?" she said, affecting anger in order to cover her confusion.

"Report speaks confidently of an engagement between you, and really I must say,—though I know my opinions are neither valued nor welcome,—that your own conduct affords a very good foundation for such rumours being afloat."

"*My* conduct? Really I do not understand you, nor do I choose to be schooled."

"Just as you please. I wished to act a sister's part in warning you of the reports at present in circulation. And I see no reason for changing my opinion, that Sir Charles March's constant visits to this house, and his attendance on you in public, authorize the conclusion that you either *are* engaged, or are on the eve of being so."

"And suppose it true,—which, by the way, I do not allow,—what have the people of Coleminster to do with it?"

"People always choose to have to do with such matters," said Mrs. Bramble, with an air of great worldly experience. "And you—as the daughters of Sir Joseph Bramble"—Margaret bridled—"are naturally much more decided objects of observation than persons of inferior rank. The world"—[the *Coleminster* world!!]—"expect you to form high alliances, and *our* party, the Tories, look to your strengthening their interests by your marriage. In short, rank renders individuals almost public property, and Sir Charles March, as Mrs. Perry says——"

"So it is from the Perrys, after all, that you have gained this wonderful intelligence!" said Margaret, with a superb toss of the head. "I assure you, all *they* can say of Sir Charles March will have no effect whatever on me, except to increase my contempt of them. I was not blind to Mrs. Perry's manœuvres, believe me, at the last county ball. I saw how she coaxed and wheedled Sir Charles into dancing with one of her dowdy daughters, on whom no soul took pity but poor Joseph, who, I

suspect, obeyed orders. Sir Charles whispered to me, as we met in the quadrille, 'I have more than Lord Byron's aversion to dumpy women.' All that any of *that* family can say, I shall place to the account of 'envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness.'"

"Of course, you will form your judgment according to your own pleasure, as other people take the liberty of doing even on your actions," said Mrs. Bramble with as much hauteur as she could assume. "They *have* ventured to say, that Sir Charles March is a person of no fortune whatever,—that his title was merely bestowed by a Moorish prince or an American cacique, or something of that kind,—and that he certainly is not in his Majesty's navy or in the Company's sea service. What he *is*, it rests with you to discover,—or your family, who have a right to ascertain his pretensions."

"Have they?" said Margaret, roused to irrepressible indignation. "I should like to know, which of them would venture to attempt assuming a control over my actions."

"It is no concern of *mine*," returned Mrs.

Bramble emphatically, "beyond the natural, and, I think, proper, anxiety I must feel for the respectability of all with whom I am connected. Mr. Bramble has commissioned me to mention the matter to you, and I am persuaded, if you refuse to take, what he considers, decided measures, he will speak to Sir Joseph."

"Really!" said Margaret, her lip quivering with anger. "I recommend it to Mr. Bramble to assume the reins in his *own* family, before he ventures to direct his father's. I admire your shielding your interference beneath his authority, when the whole world knows him to be one of those obliging husbands, who see every thing according to their wives' pleasure."

Mrs. Bramble rose and walked to the door; as she turned the key, she looked round on Margaret with an air of dignity, and said, "I have the satisfaction of having performed my duty, and whatever may be the result, I am exonerated."—Having thus spoken she quitted the room.

Margaret's anger was not quite unmingled with other feelings. If her heart had not been

originally interested in the progress of Sir Charles March's attentions, it is quite certain that the satisfaction which had once resulted from ambition alone, was now derived partly from love. She was attached to him as much as it was in her nature to be attached to any human being, and though probably the sentiment was not strong enough so entirely to subdue her pride as to lead her into a very decided *mésalliance*, she was beginning to think that *fortune* was not of first importance,—that her own portion might suffice them,—and that as Sir Charles *was* Sir Charles, all other considerations were but of light weight in the balance.

But then he had not spoken out,—declared himself, as it is called. How provoking!—Doubtless he had his reasons, and if so, might resent the interference Mrs. Bramble threatened, as indelicate and premature. How was she to act in this dilemma? To hazard the loss of him was not to be thought of. To urge him to an avowal was impossible, but—surely he might be *managed* into one, and Margaret, with the satisfaction one always feels in a

transition from a state of suspense to one of decision, resolved immediately to put in action that sagacity on which she piqued herself. She was not alarmed by the fear that some of her relations might take offensive measures, before she could commence operations; for as Mrs. Bramble had been so careful to speak to her private ear, it was certain her husband would not advance a step until she had communicated the result of her impertinent interference, which she could not possibly do until they entered that convenient place for tête-à-têtes, their carriage. She had, she thought, two days before her, for it would require some persuasion to induce Joseph, whose head and hands were full of his farm and the losses he sustained in the management of it, to ride over to Coleminster the next morning, as it was a rule with him never to be absent from home on two successive days. Many people act on rules quite as absurd, and then congratulate themselves on their consistency and regularity forsooth!

Sir Charles was expected to dine with them that evening, and Margaret's hopes expanded

as the time when the business of *her* drama was to commence, approached.

Mrs. Bramble drove off with her husband very soon after she quitted Margaret, who, on joining the family in the breakfast-room, was presently convinced that no communications had been made to them on the subject so interesting to her. But she found, that Mrs. Bramble had contrived to fill the bosom of Lucy with even greater uneasiness than hers. She had been quite brilliant in her raillery regarding Mr. Herbert's attentions to Miss Orme,—congratulated him on the courage which ventured to encounter a blue,—and was silenced only by a cold taciturnity on his part, very foreign to his general manner. Margaret devoutly wished, that her sister-in-law would emigrate from the precincts of the cottage less frequently than, at present, she found it agreeable to do.

—Never had Margaret watched the sun's decline with a heart throbbing with emotions so strong as on this evening. All the *public* parts of the house were illuminated with a brilliancy that had been attempted only during the visit

of Mr. Herbert. Margaret's eyes flashed with hope, and her cheeks glowed with anxiety. She was dressed in the most becoming style, and altogether she looked really pretty enough to excite the admiration which Sir Charles March's countenance expressed.

Dinner passed over as usual. The ladies retired to the drawing-room. Emma, who felt herself always *de trop* in the society of her two sisters, sheltered herself from their sarcasms at the piano, and drowned the voices in the overwhelming sounds of a thundering concerto. But Margaret was silent, replying reluctantly to an occasional observation from Miss Bramble on the marked attention paid her by Mr. Herbert, quite incompatible with the foolish reports which Mrs. Bramble had thought fit to promulgate, evidently for the purpose of annoying her. Lucy was fortunately too engaged by her subject, to notice the evident abstraction of her sister, who was so preoccupied with her own projects as to be absolutely incapable of wasting a thought on any matter of inferior moment. And yet Mr. Herbert's man-

ner had been *encouraging*, if such a word be pardonable considering the relation of the parties. He was evidently in high spirits;—he seemed under the influence of an abundant joy, that caused him to overflow with benevolent and almost affectionate feelings for everybody about him. Always polite and *decorously* attentive, he was this morning positively gallant, and the observant Doctor Tom flattered himself, that he might justifiably indulge hopes of his sister's forming an alliance which, two years since, would have been beyond the utmost flight of his ambition. Doctor Tom was neither a philosopher of books nor of the world. It had not come within the scope of his observation, that certain occasional and, of course, *transitory* moods of mind are produced by circumstances the most remote imaginable from the objects that appear to excite them. He forgot that Mr. Herbert's present exhilaration,—so remarkably distinguished from his characteristic calmness,—could not, with any plausibility, be assigned to causes to the influence of which he had daily been subjected for the last month,

and which had never produced a similar effect. However, Doctor Tom was ignorant, and he was happy.

Margaret, unmoved in this emergency by aught but her own important interests, cared nothing for Mr. Herbert or his proceedings. Her whole interest was occupied by Sir Charles March, and as soon as possible after coffee had been served, she drew towards the piano in the certainty that he would follow her.

How Margaret managed her tête-à-tête, it is impossible to describe for the benefit of spinsters similarly situated, inasmuch as, for obvious reasons, it was never divulged by the parties principally concerned. Its result may be divined from the following note, placed in her hands early the next morning by the confidential servant who had once been the medium of correspondence between Miss Bramble and Mr. Crosby, and who yet looked, with tender regret, on that past period of free-will and perquisites.

"Your conversation last night encouraged hopes which I have, by every effort, endeavour-

[illegible] to extinguish. Not that I was blind to your attractions, or have ever ceased to love you one moment during our acquaintance, but because, measuring the expectations of your family for you by their wealth, I shrunk from the prospect of having my proposals rejected as presumptuous, and myself excluded from all intercourse with her who is, and will ever be, the object of my most ardent devotion.

"But now that by your words,—and yet more by your manner, your looks, you have convinced me I am not indifferent to you,—that in your breast an advocate exists for me whose voice will, I trust, be more eloquent than the opposing wishes of the assembled world,—it would not only be too great fastidiousness, but positively dishonourable in me to attempt to dissemble longer. Know then that I love you with the most intense and unbounded love,—that to call you mine is the highest earthly felicity to which I can aspire. Whether I shall ever attain to it, rests entirely with yourself.

"Of my rank and position in the world I need not speak; those belong to the public. My

connexions are sufficiently well known to you by the fact of my being indebted to my relation for an introduction,—for what I consider the chief blessing of my existence. With the extent of my income you are not so well acquainted, and may probably conjecture *why* I hesitated to propose to you, when I inform you that it is so small, that unless aided by professional exertions,—and a noble profession is the sea,—I should not possess a competence. That your fortune will probably be large, I am well aware, and I have no better means of evincing my disinterestedness, than to urge you to a measure which will afford Sir Joseph a reasonable pretext for depriving you of it.

"To propose myself to Sir Joseph as a match suitable for his daughter, would be to subject myself to so mortifying a repulse, that, I shrink from the prospect of encountering it. And indeed it could answer no good end. Surely it would be better to marry without his consent than against it. Nor do I think you, with your delicacy of constitution"—[Mem. Miss Margaret Bramble's health had

been robust from her earliest infancy to the present moment,]—"you would be able to encounter your father's opposition, and the denunciations and violence which, I foresee, would be lavished on you by Doctor Bramble, who, being proud of his sisters, is naturally, and perhaps laudably, ambitious for them. In a word, our plan must be to take a step which, although the first suggestion of it must startle you, I think I shall eventually be able to convince you is, on all accounts, the most prudent measure we can decide on adopting.

"If I have not been indulging myself in a delusion, so delightful that to be awakened from it would be despair, meet me at noon to-morrow in the poplar walk below the bridge. In a crisis so momentous as this to both of us, an interview will avail more than a hundred letters, and will enable us to arrive at a more perfect knowledge of our mutual sentiments. Forgive so presumptuous a request. My whole soul is in the matter too completely to allow me to attend to forms.

"However you may decide, believe that

nothing can diminish the attachment of your most faithful and most devoted,

"CHARLES MARCH."

And Margaret *did* meet Sir Charles on the poplar walk on the noon of the morrow. And she met him also on many succeeding morrows.

CHAPTER IX.

THE day of polling arrived, and a time of great bustle it was, not only to the Brambles but to all the Coleminsterians. Heads and windows were broken, after the most approved manner at contested elections; — colours were mounted and torn away;—the partisans of the two parties pelted each other with surprising animation;—enough beef was eaten to provision a fleet for a voyage, and enough ale drunk to float it.

The books were closed, and the returning officer pronounced Arthur Herbert, Esquire, duly elected.

How delightfully occupied were the Miss Brambles in decorating the chair in which the candidate was to be exhibited upon the shoul-

ders of the electors! How gaily were they themselves dressed in blue and white;—how they delighted in showing themselves at the most public window in the borough;—and how prodigiously they waved their snow-white cambric handkerchiefs! How they talked of the good-fortune of their relation,—the zeal and success of Sir Joseph's efforts! They were in perfect ecstasy when the pressure of the crowd compelled the triumphal procession to stop so near them as to allow them, by raising their voices to a proper pitch, to speak to Mr. Herbert, and display to an awe-struck public the familiar intimacy that existed between them and the demi-god of the hour. To be sure they did endure a slight pang when they remarked the air of *empressement* with which he kissed his hand to Miss Orme, who stood in a balcony not ten yards from their window. But that was a slight mortification when compared with the exuberant honours paid to themselves, not only by the new member, but by all the gentlemen in his train,

amongst whom Sir Charles March was not the least distinguishable and distinguished.

The public dinner of that day *might* have terminated Mr. Herbert's toils, and have left him his own man again. But the Brambles had decreed otherwise. Doctor Tom undertook to convince him, that the ladies of the county would be extremely dissatisfied if he did not pay them the compliment of a ball; and he backed his arguments by so many remarks on the predominant influence of women all over the world,—the possibility of the dissolution of parliament, and the consequent necessity of preserving the favourable sentiments manifested on the present occasion, that Mr. Herbert, if not convinced, was silenced,—which answered Doctor Tom's purpose quite as well. A ball at the public rooms was accordingly announced to take place in a fortnight.

Delightful as such a prospect was, it did not so completely absorb Miss Bramble's faculties as to render her insensible to something extraordinary in the manner of her favourite sister.

She walked out alone much more frequently than she used to do, and her mind was evidently so preoccupied by important considerations, that she could hardly give that attention to the preparations for the ball which they, who would be in a certain degree the ladies' patronesses, must be expected to bestow on it. Miss Bramble fancied, that Sir Charles had at length made the proposals so long anticipated, and so ardently desired. But what need of concealment when she was so sure of sympathy and approbation? Why such an appearance of anxiety—of *nervousness?*

Miss Bramble was puzzled,—and more so, when Margaret persisted in her declaration, that white satin dresses would be the most appropriate garb for herself and her sisters at the approaching gala. In vain Miss Bramble descanted on the propriety of their appearing in the colours of their party,—a party they had so strongly supported,—which, in fact, they headed. Nothing *could* render so flagrant an omission of a proper compliment to Mr. Herbert pardonable, but the circumstance of the appearance of

a *bride*,—and that seemed out of the question, as far, at least, as herself and Mr. Herbert were concerned.

"But I and Sir Charles March?" said Margaret quickly, as if taking a sudden resolution.

"Oh, if matters are so advanced as to bring such an occurrence within the compass of possibility, there is nothing more to be said. For my part, however, I think it quite out of the question. Wedding-dresses not even ordered!"

"Who that really loves, gives a moment to such vulgar considerations?" said Margaret, indignantly. "Suppose we do not mean to wait for any nonsense of the kind?"

"But the proposals, my dear Margaret,—and asking papa, and all that. I wonder what Tom will think of it."

"Let Tom mind his own affairs,—or Mrs. Ellis's," returned Margaret, with one of her most emphatic tosses. "Tom knows too well what I have in my power, to say or do any thing offensive to *me*, depend on it. However,—don't faint,—and take my smelling-bottle,—

I advise you to prepare for a surprise,—an event;—well, you open your eyes wide enough, Lucy;—you can bear to hear that I have been married these three weeks;—*I am Lady March!*"

Nothing ever equalled the majesty of that declaration. It may be paralleled probably by that contained in the celebrated lines—

> "These are Clan Alpine's warriors true,
> And, Saxon, *I* am Roderick Dhu!"

and the effect of *that* on Fitz-James, hardly exceeded the sensation *this* produced on Miss Bramble.

"Married!—married!—Gracious heaven!—what will papa say—and Tom—and ———?" Miss Bramble's speech failed her.

"As to Tom, *his* opinion goes for nothing, and papa, as you know, is always manageable."

"But how?—when?—where?—Do explain, if you can, Margaret, for I am dying with curiosity."

And Margaret—Lady March—as concisely as she could, related, that, about a month since, Sir Charles had convinced her how greatly pre-

ferable marrying without the consent of friends was to marrying against it;—that she had, after some *reasoning*, admitted the force of his arguments and agreed to take the decisive step he proposed;—that a license had, by the instrumentality of a friend of Sir Charles's, been procured from London,—that they had been married by the vicar of the parish in which he resided, who was a friend of his, and who had promised to keep their secret, having ascertained that she—the bride—was of age to judge for herself;—that her frequent absences from home, which she was sure must have surprised, and possibly have offended her sister, had been passed in the society of her husband;—and finally, that she was resolved to delay the necessary disclosure no longer, as she had decided on the propriety and expediency of appearing at the election-ball as *Lady March*.

"I wish you joy heartily, my dear," said Lucy, embracing her, "and now *do* tell me all about Sir Charles,—how he came by his title,—where he means to live,—every thing, in short, that interests yourself."

"Indeed as to our future residence, we have decided on nothing, and I confess I think our remaining here, for the present, would be advisable. I think it would be a comfort to you all."

Miss Bramble opened her eyes to their full extent. "But it was always such a principal object with you, Margaret, to have an establishment of your own."

To this Margaret agreed, and she went on, with many palliations, to state, that Sir Charles's circumstances were not precisely so affluent as her family might wish; but with the addition of the fortune her father, Sir Joseph, would of course give her, they should be very comfortable, which was all she desired. She was not ambitious of wealth; content with her position,—her rank,—she felt that *her* consequence could not be diminished by the absence of an equipage or a sumptuous table. She was *Lady March*; that was sufficient to constitute a right of admission to the very first circles. Her husband had acquired his rank in the most gallant manner;—he was a knight of the Portuguese Order of the

Tower and Sword, an honour bestowed on him by the King of Portugal for the bravery he had displayed in a naval action, by which a frigate of his Majesty's was preserved from an enemy of far superior force. He had been educated as a physician, but before he had obtained his diploma, some youthful peccadillo —an intrigue with his mother's maid, or with his mother's friend, she forgot which,—occasioned his being sent on board as an assistant surgeon; in which capacity he had signalized himself in the engagement for which he had been knighted. She did not add—perhaps she did not know—that every officer of that ship was offered the same honorary reward, or a pecuniary recompense, the latter of which was preferred by the majority,—indeed that the equivocal honours of this Order were accepted only by the surgeon and a lieutenant of marines. Neither did she avow, that the relationship existing between Sir Charles and the young and proud Oxonian, who had introduced him to their house, was very remote,—the mothers of the two being cousins, the one

marrying a gentleman, and the other,—Sir Charles's parent,—a retail tradesman who had failed, and who was thankful to be saved from all anxiety relative to the welfare of *Scapegrace*, as he was accustomed to call his son, by seizing the proffered opportunity of getting him on board one of his Majesty's vessels.

Lucy looked as if she did not very well know what reply to make to these unexpected details. Margaret was conscious there had been much in this disclosure which had mortified even herself,—had awakened the slightest possible suspicion,—so slight that she would hardly acknowledge it to her own heart,—that *she*, the clever, the finessing, had been duped. She stifled the painful thought with laudable resolution, whenever it *would* intrude; but she could not pardon another for venturing to entertain similar sentiments, and her " well, Lucy ? " after having expected, in vain, for some seconds, her sister's reply, was pronounced in a tone of asperity to which Lucy was too well accustomed to trifle with the frame of mind it indicated.

"I should advise your telling papa as soon as possible,—immediately, that is," said Miss Bramble, when she found she *must* speak.

"*I* tell papa!" exclaimed Margaret, in high indignation; "who in the world ever heard or dreamt of a person in *my* situation making such a disclosure!—It is quite out of reason to expect it, to say nothing of the want of feeling."

"Don't be in a passion, Margaret. If you do *not* tell, who must?"

"Who so proper as yourself, my elder sister?"

"Indeed I have not courage," said Miss Bramble, sitting down, and looking rather paler than usual.

"*Courage!*—What mighty share of courage, I should like to know, is requisite to enable you or anybody to tell Sir Joseph Bramble, that his second daughter is *Lady March?*"

"I wish Mrs. Bramble would call;—she would do it so much better. I fear I have really not sufficient nerve."

"Mrs. Bramble, indeed!—I should be very

thankful truly, for *her* interference!—I know she will be envious to death of *my precedence.* No, no, Lucy,—no Mrs. Bramble, if you please; you, and you only, must speak to Sir Joseph, and I think I deserve it of you, when you recollect my exertions in Mr. Crosby's affair."

Miss Bramble dared not offer another word of decided objection. "What shall we say to Tom?" was all she ventured now to insinuate.

"Leave him to *me;—I*, at least, have no fears. Sir Joseph is in his study; I wish you would go to him directly."

Miss Bramble obeyed, with slow and reluctant steps. It is not necessary to follow her through her explanation, which was received by her father with all the exclamations, surprise, sorrow, and *self-comforting*, that might be expected from his feeble and undemonstrative character. He did not wish to part with his daughters, and he had no objection in the world to Margaret and her husband's living

with him;—indeed, he said, he should like it rather than otherwise. He supposed Sir Charles would expect to receive some fortune with his wife, more especially as it appeared he had none himself. He did not know how he could manage to give her anything. His present style of living was much more expensive than he could afford. He wished the election-ball were once over, that the house might be a little quiet again, and the necessary retrenchments made. He must say, he had no pleasure in perpetual gaiety, and having his house filled with people for whom he cared nothing, and who cared nothing for him. He was quite satisfied with having his children round him, and with the addition of Sir Charles March they should be quite a large party of themselves. They *must* give up parties and that kind of thing, to which Margaret, having a husband, would not, he should think, offer any objection. He hoped she would be happy—wished Sir Charles were richer—wondered when Joseph would come over to Coleminster—enquired what Tom

thought of the matter,—and eventually talked himself out of that state of surprise which, in him, was generally attended with as much anger as his indolent nature permitted him to feel.

Proud of the success of her mission, Miss Bramble flew to communicate the result to her sister, whom she found, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, in the midst of a loud and angry dialogue with Doctor Tom. There was much mutual accusation;—she insisted, that if he had not brought Sir Charles forward she should not have thought of him. He accused her of levity, forwardness, and all those delinquencies of manner, on the score of which the conscience of females of a certain class is apt to be extremely sensitive *when they are found out.* By way of allaying the tempest, Miss Bramble communicated to her sister, that Sir Joseph had begun to look on her marriage with composure;—that he had talked himself into feeling it irrevocable, and was, therefore, inclined to make the best of it.

Notwithstanding the frowns and the sneers of Doctor Tom, his sister was recognised by

her family as *Lady March*, and her husband received with the consideration due to his relationship. According to the marriage-settlement of the late Lady Bramble, Sir Joseph had only a life interest in her property, which, on his decease, was to be shared in equal portions by all her children. The total was very little less than fifteen thousand pounds, and when Mr. Bramble was made acquainted with the fact of his sister's marriage, he recommended that she should be put in immediate possession of her quota, that her husband might, at least, be exonerated from the burden of her support. As for himself and his family, Mr. Bramble suggested, that it certainly was Sir Charles March's business to provide for *them*. He was in the receipt of his half-pay, and probably, if Mr. Herbert could be prevailed upon to exert his interest in his behalf, he might get employed again in a man-of-war, and his wife, during his necessary absences from England, might continue to reside as before with her father; or if that should be disagreeable or inconvenient, might find a cheap abode in some of the vil-

lages near Portsmouth or Plymouth, where the wives of sea-faring men resided, he believed, in great numbers.

To all this Sir Joseph said little, for he had lost the capacity of exertion. He had allowed the sceptre to depart from his hands, until they were, at length, unable to wield it.

Mr. Herbert was, perhaps, the least surprised of the family party, for he had observed certain indications which had led him to contemplate the immediate marriage of Sir Charles March with Margaret, as by no means the most improbable thing in the world. He paid his compliments to the bride and bridegroom with that gentlemanlike composure, which characterised his ordinary manner, and which was not in the least disturbed by the broad insinuation of Doctor Tom, who turned round to his eldest sister, and said, "I suppose, Lucy, we shall find you and a certain honourable friend of mine stealing a similar march on us one of these days."

Miss Bramble simpered, looked infinite

things, but was wise enough to say nothing.

Margaret next solicited, and obtained, from her father, such a sum of money, under the name of a wedding present, as enabled her to make those additions to her wardrobe which she deemed indispensable. She had resolved to dazzle all her dear friends, by the splendour of her appearance at church on the following Sunday, and by the unique elegance of her dress at the election-ball. The *first* of her ambitious projects was realized so amply, that Miss Bramble detected Mrs. Ellis in holding her prayer-book upside down, in her anxious scrutiny of the splendours of Lady March. People, in short, looked quite envious enough to gratify the most inordinate wishes of the bride.

As for the ball, that was yet to come; and Lady March having, as she expressed it, brought her own affairs to so fortunate a termination, turned the whole force of her genius on the management of her sister's. She predicted, that the approaching entertainment would be decisive; and she looked

forward with secret impatience to the period, when the marriage of Mr. Herbert with Lucy would sanction all possible demands on the exertion of his interest, which, she was quite certain, would be amply sufficient to procure such a snug sinecure for Sir Charles, as would secure him from the necessity of again entrusting himself to the mercy of the treacherous ocean.

CHAPTER X.

THE evening arrived,—fair and brilliant enough to gratify those damsels, who were compelled to use that means of conveyance to the scene of gaiety with which nature had supplied them.

The rooms filled rapidly. Blue and white, in some shape or other, decorated the person of every individual present,—save and except the bride, Lady March, who, in the pure white costume she had chosen, became immediately the object of universal observation, which was precisely what she had calculated on and what she desired. She loved notoriety with all her heart, and she did not trouble herself with analysing the feelings she excited,—whether she were admired or wondered at. She heard herself named as Lady March quite

often enough to gratify her vanity, and she was even unmoved by the sneers of the Perrys, attributing them to the envy in which, doubtless, they in some degree originated. She was rather disappointed when she found she was not to open the ball, the Lady of the Lord-Lieutenant of the county being present, whose rank demanded, that the compliment should be paid to her, and whose husband, moreover, happened to be an old friend of Mr. Herbert. After, however, having performed this necessary duty, the hero of the night—the new member—*did* dance with Lady March, and her elation was great, almost beyond the power of being kept within proper limits. It had but *one* check. Miss Orme—detestable Miss Orme—was amongst the dancers; she came with some county people who were strangers to Lady March, but with whom Mr. Herbert seemed most annoyingly intimate. Quadrilles were just then becoming fashionable, and she and Lady March happened to stand in the same set, so that the latter could not avoid observing, that Mr. Herbert, who

was a very gentlemanly dancer, committed two most provoking blunders at the moment when the figure placed him and Miss Orme vis-à-vis. Once afterwards, in the course of the evening, she was seated so near Miss Orme, as to overhear Mr. Herbert saying—"I wish you would let me dance with you this evening. We never *can* dance together again, you know,"—words so enigimatical that Lady March could not arrive at any satisfactory solution of them. Miss Orme did *not* dance with Mr. Herbert. At the supper-table, Lady March sat opposite a group of strangers,—such as find their way to election balls and no other,—who talked with so little idea of secrecy, as to put half the table in their confidence. One very vivacious damsel was quite enthusiastic in her admiration of Mr. Herbert, and begged her neighbour to point out his bride elect. Lady March's eye followed the direction of this person's, in the expectation—the hope—that it would rest on Lucy, who sat near Mr. Herbert, but to her disgust and dismay, she found that it was fixed on Miss

Orme—her evil spirit. "Well, she is good-looking enough," said the querist,—"but, in my opinion, not to be compared to *him*. To be sure there is no accounting for taste,"—a conclusion in which Lady March most completely acquiesced. At first she felt discomfited, but presently her composure returned, when she reflected that these poor ignorant people could not, by any probable conjecture, be supposed acquainted with a fact of which every body most intimate with Mr. Herbert was completely ignorant. Lady March forgot how frequently suspicion had been excited,—hints dropped,—rumours repeated;—how resolutely she herself had shut her eyes to what was passing in this direction, and how she had laboured to impress her sister's mind with a conviction she had forced upon her own.

After supper, when dancing was to recommence, the hero of the fête was missing. Lady March sat near the Lord-Lieutenant, and she heard him address Mr. Herbert on his return—"You are waited for, Herbert;—popularity-slavery is tedious enough, but must be endured on these occasions."

"I have been absent but two minutes, putting Miss Orme in her carriage."

"*Ten* minutes; but a lover is a bad chronometer." Mr. Herbert bowed, and passed on.

And was it so?—and was this object of Margaret's absolute aversion, *really* to be *Mrs. Herbert?*—to triumph over Lucy—over all the dignity of the Brambles? Was there no longer a possibility of doubt? Had not the Lord-Lieutenant insinuated?—had not Mr. Herbert admitted?—how shamefully ill he had treated Lucy!

Mr. Herbert did not return home in Sir Joseph Bramble's carriage. He was of course compelled to remain late,—so late, indeed, that Sir Joseph, who was overcome with sleep and fatigue, was for once, resolute in his will to leave the ball-room. Lady March was dying to speak to him, in what manner she hardly knew; something bitter—something that should acquaint him with the view *she* took of his conduct. Next morning at breakfast she resolved to open a battery upon him.

At the commencement of that meal on the following day, Lady March was ominously silent. The rest were engaged in a lively discussion of the whims of the last evening. Every body seemed in such excellent temper, that Margaret, envious of their enjoyment, was anxious to render them as uncomfortable as herself. She only waited for an opportunity; —it came at length. Doctor Tom remarked that he had seen Miss Orme at the ball; had always fancied she never attended entertainments of so frivolous a kind; suggested that she would have been more suitably situated at a lecture on chemistry or galvanism; she did not dance,—probably because no body asked her.

"I did," said Mr. Herbert, with a slight blush.

"Did *you?*" said Margaret, affecting surprise. "I thought I heard you say you hated *blues.*"

"It depends on the *shade,*" said Mr. Herbert quietly.

Luckily, the readiness of Sir Joseph and Emma, in offering the necessary congratulations, covered in some degree the discomposure of the rest of the party. The face of Doctor Tom was red and pale alternately. He had calculated much on Mr. Herbert's patronage bringing him into professional repute, and its *better* consequence, professional practice. And he had the mortification of finding him on the eve of marriage with the woman whom, of all others, he most cordially hated, and to whom he had taken every possible means of displaying his aversion. Farewell to all hope of patronage from him—with *such* a wife—who would probably regulate both her own and her husband's actions, after her own sovereign will and pleasure! In an instant, Doctor Tom took a survey of the various evil consequences he foresaw from so unsuitable an union, and his indignation was divided between Mr. Herbert's folly and his own unpardonable imprudence. Could he but have foreseen?——

As to Margaret, she withdrew with her sister as speedily as possible, after remaining long

enough to hear Mr. Herbert beg, that Emma would walk with him as far as Miss Orme's, who had a particular favour to request of her, which she would have the pleasure of soliciting herself;—" and he was sure," he added, " Miss Emma would be more disposed to listen favourably to her friend than to himself." And Emma prepared with alacrity to accompany him.

Miss Bramble was greatly agitated. She wept so violently, that she heard neither the outpourings of her sister's indignation, nor her attempts at consolation. Nor would she have been greatly benefited by them if she *had* heard them. It was small comfort to know, that there were a hundred men quite as well worth having as Mr. Herbert, if they were not within her reach; —or to be told, that he had proved himself a most uncommon fool, since *she* did not benefit by his folly;—or to be assured, that he could not fail of being miserable with a woman of such low connexions as Miss Orme,—all poor people, who would be everlastingly applying to him for assistance in some shape or other.

"I am not thinking of Mr. Herbert,—that is, not much," said Miss Bramble, as soon as she could speak.

"Of what on earth then *are* you thinking?" inquired Lady March, most justifiably surprised.

"I wish I had not been so hasty with poor Crosby," said Miss Bramble, sobbing; "I know he was *really* attached to me."

"Stuff!—nonsense!—Are you in your senses, Lucy?" demanded Lady March thoroughly provoked. "You did not relinquish *him* on Mr. Herbert's account, and in every other respect, your prospects are just the same as they were before you tormented me and Tom and every body, to help you to get rid of the man. And now you turn round on us, and wish you were still involved in that shameful entanglement."

"I see nothing shameful in it," retorted Miss Bramble, "nor does Mrs. Emmings, the rich widow, if I could judge by her behaviour last evening. He was her partner every time she chose to dance." "Depend on it," said Lady

March, "there is nothing in it. Mrs. Emmings is not so easily caught by a flowery sermon."

But Lady March was deceived. Mrs. Emmings *was* caught, and gave herself and her riches to Mr. Crosby before the expiration of the year, who realised, it was supposed, by this matrimonial speculation, five times as much as he would have gained by an union with Miss Bramble, even if the noon of Sir Joseph's splendour had continued in all its brightness. What happiness he found, is quite another consideration. With him wealth had always been the summum bonum; and whether it proved so, being encumbered with one of the completest viragos that ever caused a husband to tremble, as *he* never divulged his secret, noboby else may venture to conjecture.

A few weeks after the eventful election-ball, the marriage of Mr. Herbert with Miss Orme was solemnized at Coleminster, with an absence of parade and ostentation that did honour to the good sense and good taste of the parties; Emma Bramble being the only

bridesmaid. Some years have now elapsed since it occurred, and Mr. Herbert is still as fond and as proud of his wife, as if he had married a woman of family and an heiress. His attachment was the result of esteem, and he lives to experience that most delightful sentiment of which the human heart is capable,—passion mellowed into the tenderest friendship.

And the Brambles—where are they?—Sir Joseph died a year since, a ruined and broken-hearted man, bewailing, in his last moments, the circumstance of his being *knighted*, as the cause of his ruin, since it tempted him to resign trade as beneath him,—rendered him submissive to the extravagance of his family,—and had undoubtedly been the leading motive of his daughter Margaret's most unfortunate marriage with Sir Charles March,—a needy and unprincipled adventurer, of the humblest origin, incapacitated from again obtaining employment in the navy, by former misdemeanours, which had caused a mark of exclusion to be put against his name. He and his wife are now living on the interest of her portion of

her mother's fortune, in an obscure village on the Welsh coast, having three or four children to provide for on an income which is barely sufficient to supply the necessaries of existence. The unfortunate Miss Bramble—*still* Miss Bramble,—lives with them, lamenting, day after day, the dismissal of Mr. Crosby, the only man, she repeatedly declares, who ever really loved her. This assertion always produces a rejoinder from Lady March, which generally leads to a tissue of angry recrimination, that add double bitterness to the cup of poverty and obscurity which they are compelled to drain.

Mr. Bramble quitted the cottage soon after the death of Sir Joseph, and in defiance of the angry remonstrances of his wife, recommenced business. Experience has converted his former pliability into inveterate obstinacy, and he pursues his industrious career with a dogged pertinacity which, if it destroys his temper, at least ensures his prosperity. In a few years, should his life be prolonged to that period, it is possible he may accumulate a fortune suffi-

cient to justify his retiring to the *otium cum dignitate;*—but the demon of avarice appears to be gaining decided possession of the whole man, and Mrs. Bramble declares her conviction that he will live and die a plodding tradesman.

As to Doctor Tom, his admiration of Mrs. Ellis so far exceeded the boundaries of propriety, as to lead to a permanent separation between the husband and wife. In Mr. Ellis's rank of life a divorce, procurable as it would undoubtedly have been, was out of the question, but the affair was so much talked of, that families the least scrupulous were deterred from calling in the professional aid of a physician who had so committed himself. Doctor Tom found, therefore, that all prospect of success as a private practitioner was out of the question, and to escape at once from the scene of former splendour, and from Mrs. Ellis's demands on his temper and his purse, he accepted the offer of Mr. Herbert, who had interest enough to get him an appointment in the East India Company's service, as assistant surgeon.

her mother's fortune, in an obscure village on the Welsh coast, having three or four children to provide for on an income which is barely sufficient to supply the necessaries of existence. The unfortunate Miss Bramble—*still* Miss Bramble,—lives with them, lamenting, day after day, the dismissal of Mr. Crosby, the only man, she repeatedly declares, who ever really loved her. This assertion always produces a rejoinder from Lady March, which generally leads to a tissue of angry recrimination, that add double bitterness to the cup of poverty and obscurity which they are compelled to drain.

Mr. Bramble quitted the cottage soon after the death of Sir Joseph, and in defiance of the angry remonstrances of his wife, recommenced business. Experience has converted his former pliability into inveterate obstinacy, and he pursues his industrious career with a dogged pertinacity which, if it destroys his temper, at least ensures his prosperity. In a few years, should his life be prolonged to that period, it is possible he may accumulate a fortune suffi-

[redacted]

[redacted]

NOV 3 0 1941

[redacted]